

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上の ホライゾン

きみとあそんで

IV_上



特-7

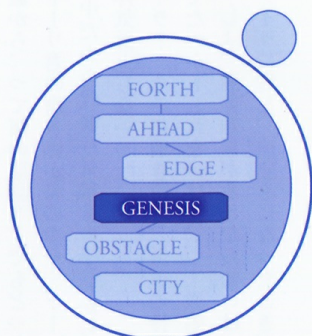


GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまでⅣ〈上〉

川上 稔

特典文庫

BCXA
0415



The 1st.GENESIS

NOT FOR SALE



かわかみ みのる
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。前巻がたまたまページ数が増えただけかと思いきや、そんなことはなかった模様。もはや普通の文庫本を作っているのと変わらない状況に印刷所も泣いたとか。

【特典文庫】

GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン

きみとあさまでⅠ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅡ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅢ〈上〉〈下〉
きみとあさまでⅣ〈上〉

【電撃文庫】

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上のホライゾンⅠ〈上〉〈下〉
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境界線上のホライゾンⅣ〈上〉〈中〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾンⅤ〈上〉〈下〉

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栃木育ち「ラムレーズンと名のつくお菓子はとりあえず食べたい。酒饅頭とかもアルコールの匂いがいい」ラムレーズン饅頭ですかねー。

© 川上稔/アスキー・メディアワークス/境界線上のホライゾン製作委員会

カバー/旭印刷

『抜き身の心』

食事の後に、すぐに着替える訳ではない。それなりの化粧もあるし、

「でもその前に、は・み・が・き」

喜美は、洗面台のコップに差してある白塗りの歯ブラシを取った。

続いてやってきた浅間が朱塗りの手に取って、最後に来たミトツダイラが、

「ええと私のは……」

「ミトのは鏡横の戸を開けて……、あ、これです。ここ。頻度高くないのでしまってます」

有り難う、とミトツダイラが歯磨き粉を見る。木の箱入り、匙で取る粉タイプのそれは、

「焼き茄子味はありませんの？」

「あ、こっちに焼き肉味がありますよ」

「素晴らしいですわ！是非とも！」

消臭効果はどれだけあるのだろうか。喜美はしかし、粉を匙で取って使おうとする二人に対

し、笑みを見せ、

「今、歯ブラシ床に落とすと、いいことあるわよ？」

「え？粉が下に落ちるだけじゃないですか」

馬鹿ねえ、と喜美は、コップに差してある一本を取って胸に挟んだ。肌色塗りのそれは、

「ぐ・て・い・のっ」

言葉投げた先、二人の動きが止まった。ややあつてから、赤面の浅間が眉をひそめ、

「——そういうことはしませんっ。ですよ？ミト」

浅間が顔を振り向いた先、ミトツダイラが、笑顔で彼女の肩に手を置いた。

「智？……我が王の。頻度が高いっ。って、どういうことですか？」

「喜美——！毒蛇（やどろ）どころか藪（やぶ）から棒（ぼう）ですよ！」

「あらあら、磨き棒が藪から、って何の隠語？でもどっち？磨く方？磨かれる方？」

——あつ、やあん、トリー君の磨き棒が私の中を……！」

「こ、こらっ、うちの中から代演（だいえん）拝（はい）氣（き）稼（かせ）ぎやすいからってボンボンそういうこと言わないっ。ウズイも踊って拝氣計上しないっ」

「フフ、でもミトツダイラ？その歯磨き粉も、愚弟（でい）の持ち込みよ？ひょっとしたら貴女が

よく来てること想定してたのかもしれないけど、——愚弟（でい）セット、使ってみたくない？」

「え!?——い、いえ、しよ、消臭効果があるから匂（にお）いは、というか、ええと、あの」

なあに？とミトツダイラに対し、前屈（まへかみ）みになったときだ。

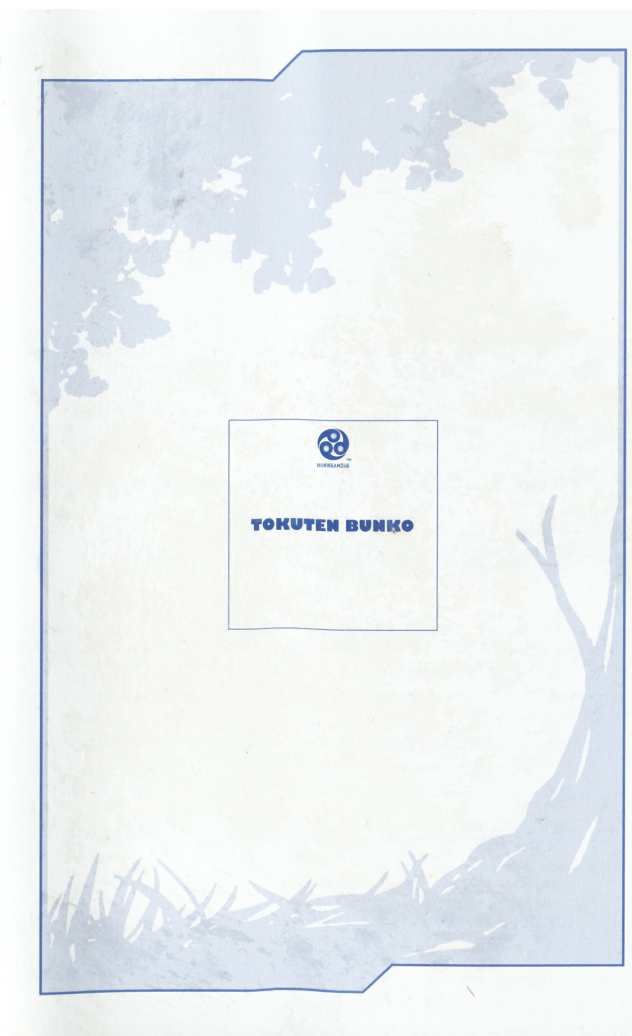
「あら？」

胸の歯ブラシが床に落ちた。

あ、と声をあげる二人の前、自分は笑みでそれを拾い上げ、

「フフ、どうしょつかしら？私は洗ってもいいし、替えてもいいし……。そうね、貴女達と

権利を交換してもいいし、それとも——、貴女達で磨いて貰おうかしら？」



Inside Story

Exposed Heart

They did not change clothes immediately after eating. They had some makeup to put on, and...

“First, we need to brush – our – teeth.”

Kimi pulled a white toothbrush from the cup by the sink.

Next, Asama pulled out a vermilion one. That only left Mitotsudaira.

“Umm, where’s mine...?”

“Open the cabinet next to the mirror for yours, Mito. ...Oh, I mean this. Right here. You don’t stay over often, so I put it away.”

“Thanks,” said Mitotsudaira as she looked to the tooth powder. The powder had to be scooped out of a wooden box with a spoon.

“Do you only have roast eggplant flavor?”

“Oh, I have yakiniku flavor over here.”

“How wonderful! I must try it!”

But how much would that help with reducing bad breath? Kimi, however, smiled at the two as they spooned out some powder and started to use it.

“Drop your toothbrush on the floor now and something good will happen.”

“Eh? Wouldn’t the powder just fall off?”

“Silly girl.” Kimi grabbed another toothbrush from the cup and placed it between her breasts. It was skin-colored and it belonged to...

“My – foolish – brother.”

The other two froze when they heard that. After a while, Asama blushed and

frowned.

“We wouldn’t do that. Right, Mito?”

When Asama looked over, Mitotsudaira smiled and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Tomo? ...Why does my king ‘stay over often’?”

“Kimiiii! Why did you have to draw attention to that!?”

“Oh, dear. Did you want to keep his ‘polishing stick’ all to yourself? What kind of euphemism is that? But which is it? Are you polishing it, or is it polishing you? ...Oh, nooo. Toori-kun’s polishing stick is inside me...!”

“S-stop that. You don’t have to say all these things just because you earn substitution Blessings so much easier inside my house. Uzy, stop dancing and calculating up her Blessings.”

“Heh heh. But, Mitotsudaira? My foolish brother brought that tooth powder here. He might have thought you would start coming here more often, but... don’t you want to try using his set?”

“Eh!? ...N-no, th-the tooth powder eliminates smells, so it wouldn’t, um, uh...”

“Yees?” said Kimi as she leaned towards Mitotsudaira. “Oops.”

But then the toothbrush fell from her cleavage and to the floor.

“Ah,” said the other two as Kimi smiled and picked it up.

“Heh heh. Now, what should I do? Wash it, or replace it? ...Oh, I know. I can let you two choose instead. Or...would you prefer brushing your teeth with it?”

Title Page

動き出したら止まらない
自分も他人も加減知らずですよ、と
そんな連中の始まり始まり



きみとあさまで

第一章『勉強部屋の雛つ女達』……P5

第二章『試験場の慌て者』……P41

第三章『境内酒場の引き出者』……P85

第四章『夜待ち場の踊り子達』……P113

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第六章『囲い場の咲き娘達』……P195

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IV

上

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

デザイン: 渡邊宏一 (2725 Inc.)

Once they start, they do not stop None of them are familiar with the concept of moderation This is their beginning

Kimitoasamade

Chapter 1: Novice Girls in the Study Room – P5

Chapter 2: Panicked One in the Testing Room – P41

Chapter 3: Gift Giver in the Shrine Bar – P85

Chapter 4: Dancers Waiting for Night – P113

Chapter 5: Warner on the Horizontal – P169

Chapter 6: Blossoming Girls in an Enclosed Place – P195

Chapter 7: Beginners in a Sleepy Place – P261

IV

A

Kawakami Minoru

Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)

Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

Characters

character

● 武蔵



あさ まとも 浅間・智

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間神社の一人娘で中位巫女。弓の射撃を得手とする。地脈の整調も得手とする。クラス内オバイカース最上位。全裸と馬鹿姉の幼馴染み。



あおい きみ 葵・喜美

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。浅間の幼馴染みで愚弟の姉。大椿系の奏者で、ダンスとエロ関係の術式が充実。どちらかというと賢姉。



ネイト・ミトツダイラ

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。水戸松平の暫定襲名者であり半人狼で六護式仏蘭西出身で武蔵内騎士連盟第一等でオバイカース低めで“です”語尾でチョーカー好きの肉好きで大体被害者。馬鹿の事を王としている。



アデーレ・バルフェット

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。眼鏡。クラス内オバイカース最下位。最下位。六護式仏蘭西系の従士。脚力があり、突撃性に優れるが貧乏バツ人生。犬好き。



むか い すず 向井・鈴

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。盲目の少女。クラス内における外道行為のストッパー。たまにアクセル。



マルガ・ナルゼ

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。黒くて白くて無い方。匪堕天六枚翼。同人作家。結構辛辣。ナイトとは恋人関係。



マルゴット・ナイト

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。金色で黒くてある方。墜天六枚翼。おおよまあまあはははは。ナルゼとは恋人関係。



P-01s

一般民。というか自動人形。この春に三河から乗り込んできたらしい。記憶が無く青雷亭に拾われて店員やってます。セメント。



なお まさ 直政

武蔵アリアダスト教導院二年。機関部で班長したり片腕義腕の姉御。



ほん だ まさ ずみ 本多・正純

三河から転入してきた男装少女。もう一回言う。男装少女。断層少女とか言わない。ギャグがよく冷える。

とり い もと ただ 鳥居・元忠

武蔵の47年度生徒会長兼総長。大椿系の上位巫女。よく笑って他人を巻き込んだり突き落とす。

おお す が やす たか 大須賀・康高

武蔵の47年度副長。体格のいいのんびり系。ラブソングとか作詞するよ！

わた なべ もり つな 渡辺・守綱

武蔵の47年度第一特務。金髪女子。槍使い。苦勞性。

む さし “武蔵”

僕らの武蔵総艦長自動人形。辛辣モードがたまりません。——以上。

おく た ま “奥多摩”

奥多摩の艦長。仕事を“武蔵”がやっちゃう事が多いので、微妙に手持ち無沙汰。たまにボディを使い分けたり。

一般生徒の方々

今回頑張らない。



あおい トーリ 葵・トーリ

この頃から既に全裸。

● Musashi

- Asama Tomo: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. The only daughter of the Asama Shrine and a mid-level shrine maiden. Specializes in archery and in tuning ley lines. Stands at the top of the class's boob caste system. Childhood friends with the nudist and his stupid sister.
- Aoi Kimi: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Asama's childhood friend and her foolish brother's older sister. An Ootsubaki-style musician with plenty of dancing and sexuality spells. More considerate than anything.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Provisional inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name, a half-werewolf, from Hexagone Française, rank 1 member of Musashi's knight's league, low on the boob caste system, speaks in a somewhat noble fashion, likes chokers, likes meat, and generally the victim. Calls the idiot her king.
- Adele Balfette: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Glasses. Lowest on the class's boob caste system. Yes, lowest. An Hexagone Française style of vassal. Has leg strength and can perform an excellent assault, but lives a poor part-timer's life. Loves dogs.
- Mukai Suzu: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Blind girl. Stopper for the horrible actions of the class. Sometimes accelerates them instead.
- Malga Naruze: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Black and white and has nothing. Six-winged fallen angel. Doujin author. Fairly bitter. In a relationship with Naito.
- Margot Naito: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Gold and black and has plenty. Six-winged descended angel. Oh, dear. Oh, my. Ah ha ha ha ha ha. In a relationship with Naruze.
- P-01s: A normal citizen. Or rather, an automaton. Apparently boarded the Musashi at Mikawa this spring. Has no memories, was taken in by the Blue Thunder, and works there. Cement-like.
- Naomasa: A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Barely appears so there might be no point in putting her here. Works as a team leader in the engine division and has one false arm.
- Honda Masazumi: Crossdressing girl who transferred in from Mikawa. Let

me say that again: crossdressing girl. No, that doesn't mean she wears a cross. Her gags get icy reactions.

- Torii Mototada: Musashi's '47 Student Council President and Chancellor. An upper level Ootsubaki-style shrine maiden. Laughs a lot, gets other people caught in the middle, and pushes them off.
- Oosuga Yasutaka: Musashi's '47 Vice Chancellor. A well-built carefree person. Writes love songs!
- Watanabe Moritsuna: Musashi's '47 1st Special Duty Officer. Blonde girl. Uses a spear. A worrier.
- "Musashi": Our overall captain automaton. Her sharp-tongued mode is the best. Over.
- "Okutama": Caption of Okutama. "Musashi" tends to do a lot of the work, so she often ends up emptyhanded. Sometimes uses different bodies for different uses.
- Normal Students: Aren't going to work hard this time.
- Aoi Toori: Already a nudist at this point.

Glossary

・**襲名**:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。

・**術式**:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡を起こすこと。

・**白砂台座**:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。

・**神格武装**:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。

・**神州**:極東のかつての呼び方。

・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。

・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制限。極東は十八歳卒業制。

た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。

・**Tes.【テス/テストメント】**:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**三征西班牙【トレスエスパンア】**:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

あ行

・**出雲産業座(IZUMO)**:極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。

・**六護式仏蘭西【エグザゴンフランセーズ】**:毛利家+フランスのこと。

・**ATELL**:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。

・**英国**:イングランド。浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。

・**M.H.R.R.**:羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。

か行

・**外燃拝気**:自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。

・**旧派【カトリック】**:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。

・**教導院**:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。

・**教譜**:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。

・**極東**:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。

・**K.P.A.Italia【ケーピーエーイタリア】**:安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。

・**賢鉱石、賢水**:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。

・**校則法**:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

さ行

・**Jud.【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】**:咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。

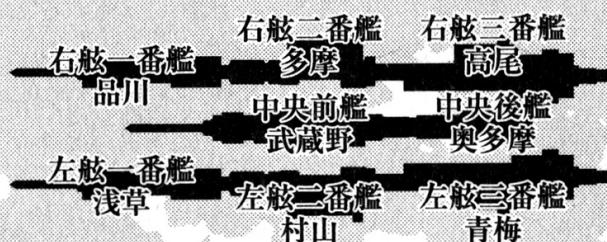
・**重奏世界**:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。

・**重奏統合争乱**:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。

・**重奏領域**:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、砕けながら現実側に合一した箇所。

words

・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。

・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。

・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

ら行

・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。

・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拌気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。

・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。

・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。

・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

な行

・**内燃拌気**:自分の中にため込んだ拌気のこと。

は行

・**拌気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**P.A.ODA【ピーエーオダ】**:織田家+オスマン。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拌気を納めること。献納。

ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っていると言われる。俗世に関与しない。

・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

●この頃の浅間の予定●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 雅楽祭に向けてどーすんの?」



「フフフ愚弟。まずはその前のテストで赤点取らないようにしないとね。あとは浅間神社で打ち上げやって雅楽祭に突入御予定よー!」

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

Asama's Plans

Toori: Sis! Sis! What are you doing now that the Gagaku Festival is coming up?

Kimi: Heh heh. Foolish brother, we first have to make sure we don't fail our exams. Then we'll celebrate at the Asama Shrine and move right on to the Gagaku Festival!

Chapter 1: Novice Girls in the Study Room

第一章

『勉強部屋の雛っ女達』



ああだこうだと
いろいろ言っても
最終的には
配点（話し合い）

No matter what

You say

It always ends like this

Point Allocation (Discussion)

"Nn."

An extended groan echoed through a lit room.

It was a 10-square-meter wooden room inside the Asama Shrine's main building.

"I love how spacious the floor is in Asama's room... I'm afraid I'll get used to sleeping over."

"Kimi, stop lying around like that." Asama spoke to Kimi who had stretched and then collapsed back onto the tatami mats while still wearing a yukata.

"Look, Mito's putting in an effort. We'll be done with the exams after tomorrow's classical lit and health/PE ones, so this is the last spurt."

"That's right. And unlike before, it's only two subjects, so it's just a little more. The Spring School Festival begins the day after tomorrow and the Gagaku Festival is three days after that to signal the end of the festival. ...We can't perform at the Gagaku Festival if you fail any exams, so you need to be prepared for tomorrow."

Asama agreed with Mitotsudaira.

...It all comes down to this.

Naito and Naruze had completed their battle with Marine two days before. All of them were now preparing for the Spring School Festival and Gagaku Festival and the last day of the exams was tomorrow.

"So, c'mon. So let's stay focused to the very end and then go perform at the Gagaku Festival."

Asama reached out to shake Kimi awake.

But just then, Kimi twisted her body and Asama's right hand dug into Kimi's

right breast.

Nh, thought Asama. And...

...It's bulging out between my fingers?

But just as she thought that on reflex...

"Ah, no, Asama! You want bigger boobs, so you're trying to absorb mine with your Palm Power, aren't you!? But I won't go down without a fight! Give me those!"

"What are you even talking about?"

She let go and Kimi went limp again.

That girl had too much of a difference between on and off.

But now that she had switched off, there was no reaction at all from Kimi.

...Honestly.

Asama made eye contact with Mito who sat past Kimi and across the tea table.

The look in her eyes said, "Let's take a quick break."

Mito nodded back and then pulled a knife and fork from the basket next to her.

"Very well, Tomo. You want a late night snack, don't you?"

"Huh...? That's not quite what I meant..."

"Ahhn, you're going to devour my flesh as a late night snack, aren't you!?"

Kimi had apparently switched back on.

But it did not matter how loudly she yelled since the Asama Shrine was soundproofed by a barrier.

Kimi switched back off again, so Asama ignored her and placed her cokepen on the study notebook sitting on the tea table.

She looked to her left and saw off-mode Kimi lying on her back, entirely limp.

Looking at her somewhat disheveled yukata and hair...

...If it wasn't for her personality, you could just classify her as a beauty...

But thanks to what she was like on the inside, she could only be classified as a crazy person.

With people, it's what's on the inside that counts, thought Asama as she viewed her friend.

"Oh, honestly..." She sighed and reached for the basket of snacks on the tea table. "Look, look, Kimi. It's that apple agar you love so much."

The basket contained some grated apple agar held together by a sugar coating. Asama waved a bite-sized piece around over Kimi's head.

"It's here. Right here."

I can't believe I'm resorting to this, thought Asama. However...

...I already used this a fair bit over the past few days, so it probably won't work today.

Her fear was justified.

Kimi reached up and tried to grab for the basket, but...

"—————"

After a while, she let her arms fall next to her body.

Her elbows were bent and her hands were on either side of her mouth.

"Feed it to me...mouth — to — mouth."

Mitotsudaira glared at her and grabbed a piece of apple agar from the basket. She then flicked the agar toward her.

"Kimi."

Kimi moved her head to catch it right in her mouth.

"That's a weird trick..."

"I do it with my foolish brother. He'll be in the kitchen while I'm in the dining room, so when he wants me to taste what he just made, we have fun doing it like that. We also do it the other way around. ...Like this."

This time Kimi grabbed a piece from the basket and threw it high toward Mitotsudaira.

And Mitotsudaira...

"Eh? Ah, wait."

She opened her mouth and tried to catch it, but it bounced off her cheek.

"————!"

The Cerberus's right head trapped it and the left head flipped it over onto the middle head.

But the Mouse-like Cerberus was an ether lifeform and thus could not eat it. Even if she did eat it, she could not digest it. So the three-headed wolf tapped on her master's bangs.

"Good job."

With an adoring look, Mitotsudaira picked up the Cerberus and took the caught prize.

She then reached for her waist hard point that was sitting on the tatami mats. She pulled out some food for such lifeforms and gave it to the Cerberus. It was some small bones made of ether.

"She goes through three of them at once? That's a lot for a pet..."

"Well, I can manage this much."

I see, thought Asama before turning back toward Kimi.

The girl was asleep. Fast asleep.

"Th-that was fast! And Kimi! Kimi! It's only eight!"

The slumbering crazy person had lowered her hands from her mouth to her chest. But those hands were moving slightly and tapping on her chest through the open chest of the yukata.

She was asleep, but she had a full-faced smile with her eyes shut. Mitotsudaira glared down at her and commented while giving the food to the Cerberus.

"She seems to be saying 'c'mon'."

"...C'mon and what?"

"I don't know, but since Kimi likes to hold things in her sleep, I wouldn't touch her."

"That's right," agreed Asama as she experimented by taking some compressed bread used for writing and placing it between Kimi's breasts. The rising and falling of the girl's breathing caused it to roll along her chest, into the open chest of the yukata, and down below her breasts.

"Nn," groaned Kimi in her sleep. She also twisted her body around. "Ah, no, s-stop. If you keep playing tentacles like that..."

"...What kind of game is that?" asked Mitotsudaira.

"...And how are you supposed to play it with only two arms?"

Mitotsudaira glared at Asama.

It took Asama about 5 seconds to realize why.

"N-no, that doesn't mean I'm particularly familiar with the concept! It's that just that, you know, Naruze sometimes talks about it! Yes, and then I have to confiscate her books to crack down on that kind of thing, yes!"

"Ho ho?"

Mitotsudaira was unusually strict this night.

So to dodge the issue, she turned toward Kimi who continued to produce odd moans in her sleep.

"C-c'mon, Kimi. Don't say such weird things in your sleep. Besides, who are you even 'playing tentacles' with in your dream?"

She asked that without really thinking, but then her expression and movements froze over.

...Who?

In front of her, Mitotsudaira had frozen up in a similar way.

The half-werewolf made a suggestion with an unmoving smile.

"...Should we wake her?"

"Go right ahead!!"

Mitotsudaira shoved her hands underneath the tea table.

She was trying to pull on Kimi's legs to surprise her.

Mitotsudaira grabbed and pulled on Kimi's legs.

"..."

She of course did not use her full strength.

...Especially when this is in response to her having a weird dream.

There was no point in getting angry at someone for their dream. That was not something they could control.

So Mitotsudaira only lightly grabbed her legs.

"Stop it, Kimi."

And she pulled to correct the girl's position on the floor.

Or she meant to.

...Eh?

Kimi's legs were there.

But even though Mitotsudaira's hands were clenched as if holding something, they were not wrapped around the legs.

...I messed up my aim!?

"What's wrong, Mito? Did your meat gauge run out, so you can't move?"

"S-stop defining me by things like that!"

But it was true she had made a mistake.

She breathed in and readied her hands once more. And...

"Here I go...!"

"Go right ahead!"

She went. She grabbed. She held on tight. This time she made sure to check first. But...

"————"

It felt like things had shifted.

She did not understand, but it was like she had slipped or been deflected. Regardless, there was one thing she could say for sure.

...I can't touch her!?

She gasped and looked up. Past Asama who was watching on in confusion, there was a sign frame floating above Kimi's sleeping head.

It was a spell.

After confirming the presence of the unfamiliar spell, Mitotsudaira raised her voice.

"W-wait, Tomo!"

"Eh?"

Asama followed Mitotsudaira's gaze and turned back toward Kimi, but the spell sign frame vanished at that very moment.

Asama looked at Kimi who was still twisting around in her sleep.

"What is it, Mito?"

"W-well, um, there was a spell..."

She needed to grab those legs before saying anything more.

But just as she quickly reached for Kimi's legs and Asama turned her way again, the previous spell sign frame appeared above Kimi's head again. And...

"————"

She could not grab her.

Even though she had moved quickly and put a lot of force into it.

...Is it an evasion spell?

When did she get that? wondered Mitotsudaira. Kimi would use assistance spells developed from Turning Point, but Mitotsudaira had never seen such a blatant evasion replacement spell. However...

"Tomo, um, above Kimi's head..."

"Eh?"

The spell sign frame vanished before Asama could turn around.

After staring at Kimi's sleeping face for a while, Asama turned toward Mitotsudaira again. She smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

"What is it, Mito?"

...Oh, she's definitely treating me like a troubled child...

It was obvious her current plan was not going to solve this, so Mitotsudaira decided to use the most surefire method of waking Kimi.

Mitotsudaira corrected her posture, straightened her spine, and faced the room's entrance.

"Oh, my king."

"...Foolish brother?"

Kimi sleepily but readily got up.

"Now, Tomo! Get her!"

Asama had no idea what that was all about, but she woke Kimi up and put on some tea.

"C'mon, Kimi, let's not get careless just because this is the last set of exams. We can goof off after school tomorrow."

"I am not being careless. Tomorrow is classical lit and health/PE, and those are my best subjects."

"But," warned Mitotsudaira while pulling some waferly things from the basket on the tea table. "If you relax because those are your best subjects, you'll be caught by surprise. ...Oh, I made these for everyone, so feel free to take some."

"...What are they?"

"Biscotti. ...These are the original form of wafers. You mix flour, eggs, almond powder, and sugar, cook them into a bread, slice them up nice and thin, and then cook them again. I've brought store bought ones a few times before."

That meant these were handmade by Mitotsudaira.

...That's sort of surprising.

When Asama thought of Mitotsudaira cooking something, it was meats or soups that came to mind, not sweets.

When Mitotsudaira called them over for a meal, they generally ate at a restaurant or at least grabbed something at a food stand in one of the nature districts.

She must have made these sweets because they had spent so many nights in a row together.

"Aren't you going to eat some?"

Sensing an imploring note in Mitotsudaira's voice, Asama nodded.

After reciting the standard pre-meal phrase, she rolled up her sleeve and reached for one.

It was a light brown wafer about the width of her fingertip. It was flat and had the color of brown bread on the inside too.

...I think I've seen these before.

She put it in her mouth.

"Nn."

Her first impression was that it was hard.

It was like cooked bread. It felt a lot like a French baguette. And that sensation continued beyond the surface to reach the inside as well.

She could not swallow it or crush it with her tongue.

When she bit down, she heard an unmistakable crunch. And it did not have the stickiness of a rice cracker.

...Sugar?

It reminded her of biting through hardened sugar. Specifically, brown sugar.

"..."

A cooked sweetness spread through her mouth.

It came from the powdery substance she had crushed with her teeth. The flour permeated with sugar was melting in her mouth.

An almost bitter sweetness and the savoriness of cooked flour both swept across her tongue.

...Oh, not good.

When she left it in her mouth, the hard thing soaked up her saliva and grew soft. She was still holding the other end in her fingers, so she pushed the rest into her mouth.

"Nn."

She bit into it and used her tongue to soften the whole thing in her mouth.

A somewhat rough and almost sticky cooked flavor reached even the area below her tongue and the sweetness seemed to soak into her. It was the distinctive sweetness of Western sweets.

The thick bitter aroma of brown sugar and a faint burnt aroma left through her nose.

She then used her tongue to carry the saliva-softened sweet powder from the back of her cheeks to her throat. None of it was hard anymore. A sticky bittersweetness remained on the back and top of her teeth, but she licked that off with her tongue.

"...Nn."

She swallowed.

After that, she took a sip of tea, took a breath, and responded to Mitotsudaira.

"That was really good. You said we've eaten these before, but those must have been a different flavor."

She realized Mitotsudaira was staring at her mouth, but the closed-mouthed reaction puzzled Asama.

"What is it?"

"Heh heh. The way you eat is a sight to behold. Isn't that right, Mitotsudaira?"

"Eh? Oh, um, uh..." Mitotsudaira waved her hands back and forth as if she had just returned to her senses. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

"No, no. I'm not done yet."

Asama reached for another one, but then something occurred to her.

...This is the kind of food that makes you gain weight, isn't it?

Oh, but it doesn't have butter, so is it fine? Then again, it does seem to be nothing but carbs. Hmm...

"I'll have one of those."

She was jealous of how readily Kimi grabbed one. But then the girl looked their way and spoke.

"Anyway, Asama, Mitotsudaira? What are we studying right now?"

"Classical lit," answered Mitotsudaira. "I have a bit of trouble with that one when the exam covers so much material."

Asama was the same, so she nodded in agreement. But Kimi...

"I heard the health/PE exam will cover combination techniques."

Mitotsudaira saw Asama freeze in place.

But not because the biscotti would make her gain weight. In fact, Mitotsudaira had also stopped moving.

The only one who could still move was Kimi who was in invincible mode.

"Don't worry. You won't have to do a live demonstration."

"O-of course not!"

"Heh heh. What has you so jumpy? But I suppose we should make sure we're

prepared!" Kimi pointed at Asama. "Now strip naked for tomorrow's exam!"

Asama was rendered speechless.

...Eh!?

She knew all too well that Kimi was a sudden person. But what did this have to do with the health/PE exam?

...N-naked!?

Here!?

The crazy person was simply nodding for no reason. Or she hoped it was for no reason because the alternative scared her.

But just to be certain, Asama tried asking.

"W-would you just sit still and watch?"

"I would also touch you."

"H-how much?"

"Well, we would be communing in our nudity. Together."

Asama adjusted the top of her yukata.

"Um," she began while seated. "I-if I let you see, would you actually study for the exams?"

"Well, I'd have to then." Kimi gave a definite nod. "Yes, if you went that far, I would keep studying until we went to sleep."

I see, thought Asama.

Then Mitotsudaira spoke up next to her.

"Tomo! Tomo! Are you planning to offer up your body just to get Kimi to study!? And Kimi, why would you-..."

"N-no, um."

Asama got Mitotsudaira to quiet down.

She did not really understand the situation, but there was one thing she could

say for sure.

"I-I wouldn't do this for anyone else. Yes."

But, she hesitated.

...We have known each other a long time.

Kimi, him, and Mitotsudaira were different.

"You see," began Asama while realizing how hopeless this girl was. "Shinto is something of a last resort. For that reason and because I'm in charge of Toori-kun and Kimi, I feel like I have to do something about them. Since they're such a nuisance to so many people."

"Come to think of it, you're right..."

Hearing that made Asama realize just how heavy a burden she carried.

But one thing was certain.

"I trust that Toori-kun, Kimi, and Mito's odd requests are actually meaningful. Even if you won't tell me the reason behind them, I trust that it isn't anything bad if you're willing to ask me for it. Also..."

Asama recalled the past.

Specifically, the ice cream story they had told the day before. Back then, he had tried to take responsibility.

...That's right.

She could not forget her responsibility toward others. So...

"When you do ask for something...I know you'll do your part afterwards. Isn't that right, Kimi?"

She turned toward Kimi and found the girl looking at her through narrowed eyes.

That worried her.

...Huh?

Had she made some kind of misunderstanding here?

"U-umm."

While feeling an odd sweat on her back and neck, Asama asked Kimi a question. She just wanted to make absolutely certain.

"Y-you did have a reason for telling me to strip here, didn't you?"

Kimi tilted her head and gave the most innocent smile imaginable.

"Here? I was only suggesting we visit your purification spring to get ourselves worked up. After washing each other and cheering each other up, we'd have to study until we went to sleep, wouldn't we?"

Asama slapped her.

Musashi had a curfew at night.

That was generally at 10 PM.

When the bell rang for 10 PM, most of the wide block gates would close.

Once the gates were closed, anyone who wanted to pass through would have to visit the guard station next to it, show their ID, explain why they needed through, and have a guard open the passage gate. That meant there was little foot traffic at night.

The short bell for 11 PM had just rung.

The flow of people had vanished from the central residential districts and nature districts of each ship. But there was some movement.

"The wide blocks and long blocks of the transport districts on the outer edges stay open at night for shipping purposes. You only have to show your ID at each long block, so use these areas when you have to move around at night, Magoichi."

"Thank you for going to all this trouble, Mototada."

The transportation wagons and laborers were much less numerous than during the day. The trio walking through Tama's transport district was Torii, Magoichi, and...

"Tadayo, have you cleared the way ahead for us?"

"Down to the third underground floor, right? I've got it all clear so we won't

have to make any detours."

"Thank you," said the girl next to Torii with a bow. Tadayo frowned at the rifle-expert demon.

"Suzuki Magoichi. ...Just so you know, I do not welcome you here."

"Testament. I understand what you mean. It would be odd if you did welcome me."

"That's fine then."

"It is?" asked Magoichi.

Tadayo turned her back on the demon girl.

"A lot of this is up to Torii. The history recreation and everything that entails is important for Musashi's future."

But...

"After that, I challenge you to a fight."

"If that will satisfy you." Magoichi gave an expressionless nod. "I will be doing enough to warrant it."

She has guts, thought Tadayo concerning Magoichi.

Tadayo was Vice President while Magoichi held no office.

Of course, Suzuki Magoichi had been part of the Honganji forces that joined with the Mlasi and she had repeatedly fought against P.A. Oda as they were taken over by Oda. Her skills had to be at least Special Duty Officer level if not higher.

Even with that, it was impressive how unshaken she was by a challenge from a Vice President. For one thing, Tadayo was a third year and Magoichi only a first year. But...

...She isn't underestimating me either.

She would accept a battle challenge from anyone.

That was just the kind of life she had lived.

The battles at Honganji must have been harsh.

"Judge. Then let's go with that. Torii, you don't have a problem with that, do you?"

"No." Torii smiled a little. "You can't know how it will turn out until you try it. But, well..."

She reached her arms around from behind Magoichi and hugged her.

The "Eh?" on Magoichi's face plainly showed this had caught her off guard.

This was an entertainer's sense of timing. Magoichi had the extreme focus of a sniper, but Torii's impeccable timing had easily slipped past her defenses.

She then grabbed Magoichi's chest.

"You really haven't changed at all, have you?"

"Changing as much as you have is not the norm, Mototada."

Tadayo had to agree with that. So she asked a question of Magoichi who knew Torii from a time before Tadayo had met her.

"What did she used to be like?"

Based on what they had been saying...

"You grew up in the same town, right?"

"Judge."

Tadayo heard Torii rather than Magoichi response.

"I'm originally from Sakai. My family worked as merchants on the edge of the large desert Harmonic Territory there. And her family ran a desert caravan guard unit. My family would often hire them."

"But then P.A. Oda arrived in Sakai."

Tadayo knew what that meant: Oda.

The Oda clan had done something as part of Nobunaga's history recreation.

"They conquered the previously free city of Sakai, didn't they?"

"Correct. I followed my father, the head of the family, by joining Honganji and fighting back against Oda. My father and brothers were killed in battle, but I lived on and was given an inherited name, partially as a means of strengthening our fighting force." Magoichi looked to Torii without slowing her pace. "But Torii used to be a horrible person."

"In what way?"

"She would readily serve me pork curry, she would eat fried chicken in front of me when I was fasting, and she would claim the lamb was pork so she could eat it all."

"Torii, you are scum."

"Don't say that so bluntly! It hurts, you know!? Besides, I was just a kid! I wouldn't do any of that now! I'd aim bigger!"

"You just earned about 5 scum points in as many seconds, so go think about what you've done, okay?"

"Will do!"

Magoichi gave Torii a highly skeptical look, so Torii had probably been like this when they were younger too.

"But," said Torii with a sidelong glance towards Magoichi. "She would always accuse me of disgracing her family and then silently aim her rifle at me."

"I can't really blame her."

"Yeah. I think one time I said 'You're wide open down here!' and pulled down her underwear."

"I'm surprised she didn't shoot you to death."

"That's cause I dodged."

Oh, so she did shoot. That's fine then. They're even.

But, thought Tadayo as a wagon loaded with festival scaffolding passed by.

She listened to the sound of the wooden wheels and kept her own pace up while she asked something.

"So, Torii. You came to Musashi after Sakai was conquered?"

Torii never said much about her past, but both her parents were teachers now. Her father was teaching the first year and her mother was teaching elementary school.

Torii looked to Musashino in the distance as she answered.

"My grandfather decided we would go to Mikawa since he didn't like the oppressive atmosphere, but after using money and other factors to earn the inherited name of Torii, he passed away. The family moved to Musashi after that and then Mikawa started driving everyone away. ...I didn't want to leave the Torii name open for just anyone, so I worked to inherit the next generation name at Musashi."

Tadayo was familiar with that last part.

She remembered when her friend's name had become "real". She had been proud for her, but since she too had an inherited name, it had also been somewhat disappointing.

...I felt like I was losing my special privilege as the only one with an inherited name.

But her way of thinking had changed once they entered high school and she joined the Student Council. To be honest...

...The more name inheritors the better!

They could not afford to be lacking in authority during jobs dealing with the Testament Union or other nations.

I was only thinking about myself in the past, she realized. But...

"Has it been about ten years since you two last met?"

"We still had my grandfather's intermediary, so we would do seasonal greetings and stuff. The people of the desert see each other like family and we don't forget our debts of gratitude for each other."

"Debts of gratitude, hm?"

Magoichi nodded at that.

"I will give you what you want."

She brushed off Torii's arms and walked forward. She faced the stairs leading down to the lodging facility in underground Tama for the crew of non-Musashi ships.

"The people of the desert repay their debts."

Three futons were laid out in a dark tatami mat room.

Asama slept in the one by the entrance, Mitotsudaira lay face down in the center one so her hair seemed to be lying on top of her, and Kimi lay in the one by the sliding door that led outside.

"Foolish brother, are you still up?"

Kimi held up a non-illuminated sign frame while conversing with Toori.

She had woken up after the other two fell asleep, most likely because of the short nap she had taken while they studied.

She could have gone to sleep, but she was curious about things back home. She had been spending the night at the Asama Shrine so much that she had not slept at home in a while. Whenever she did go home, it was only to drop off or collect something.

"Foolish brother, how have you been the last couple of days?"

"Oh, well, I've made a ton of progress on my porn games..."

"Don't do that, foolish brother. You need to save the ones that I can make good jokes about."

"Yeah, I set aside the battle ones. Also the ones that look like they have really wordy confession scenes. You tend to cry with the sad ones, so I've been focusing on them. I could really feel the sinful nature of humanity when I was crying my eyes out and doing lewd things at the same time."

"You don't have to try and make me feel better."

"Judge, judge," he replied.

But then he asked a question, perhaps just out of curiosity.

"How are things with you?"

"Judge. Asama and Mitotsudaira are asleep. ...Want to see? Asama's blanket is slipping off and she isn't wearing any underwear, so the view up her yukata is quite something!"

"No, it's wrong to have someone just give that to you. That's something you have to go there yourself for."

"I suppose so," agreed Kimi.

Then her brother said something else.

"If you're afraid, just say so. Oh, and while you *could* tell me, it'd probably be faster to tell Asama or Nate."

"Oh, I'm fine. ...In fact, I'll probably be more afraid when I get back home and don't have someone sleeping by my side. If I can't sleep, will you hold my hand?"

"Yeah. If you need me to, I can play porn games next to you until you fall asleep."

His immediate response gave her a slight smile and some warmth.

That's the thing with him, she thought, but...

"...Nn."

She heard Mitotsudaira and Asama breathing in their sleep.

So Kimi formed some more words.

"Hey, foolish brother, can you listen to something while pretending you don't understand?"

"Wow, I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Yes, that's the spirit."

But, she began in her heart.

"You've been spending a lot of time at mom's place lately, haven't you? I won't ask why, but I actually have high hopes for this situation too and I'm enjoying it."

But you know what?

"You can't cause any unnecessary trouble or betray the important things we already have. You're going to be a king, aren't you?"

"I looked into that smuggling incident from the other night," said Kimi. "In the end, you were the only one arrested, weren't you? Were you covering for your companions?"

"Wow, I really don't know what you mean."

That was fine. But...

...Was this what actually happened?

"You decided to stop doing those things with your companions the other night, didn't you?"

An underground porn game smuggling warehouse had been discovered.

It had gone undetected for so long, so it was odd for it to come to light all of a sudden.

According to Asama, it had begun with an ether reaction resembling a mysterious phenomenon.

In that case, thought Kimi.

...The warehouse's owner intentionally let it be discovered.

Why they would do that was simple.

They were beginning "something different". Her brother had split off from them and they had split off from her brother.

The incident the other night had been a ceremony allowing both sides to begin moving in a new direction.

It had been a form of purification by wiping the slate clean.

Asama's father likely knew all about it. After all, things could always take an inconvenient turn on the scene. It would have all been for naught if the decoy meant to reveal the warehouse's location had been caught. So...

"Foolish brother? Naito and Naruze did a good job back then. ...You were

right to give them more than just a tart."

...Wicked thoughts, hm?

Either Naito or Naruze had been really clever there.

The mysterious phenomena they had cornered in underground Okutama had clearly been human. It was not clear who had been inside, but they had likely been involved in the porn game smuggling.

That was why Naito and Naruze had been so thoughtful.

They must have picked up on the circumstances as well, so they had treated the decoys like wicked thoughts and had made sure confused Asama dealt with them accordingly.

That thoughtfulness had saved some influential people on the Musashi and also allowed Asama to perform her purification.

"It was funny that Asama suggested one of your tarts for their victory celebration."

"I don't really get it, sis."

"Heh heh. Get what?"

"I've done a lot since entering high school."

Yes?

"And I'm trying to pull myself together."

Because...

"That way I can do some big important thing that will probably be a lot of trouble for Asama, you, Nate, Tenzou, Shiro, Neshinbara, and everyone else around me."

She did not bother asking if it was some kind of crime.

He had stopped doing that and taken responsibility for it. So...

"Have you told anyone what it is?"

"No. Not yet."

That meant he had not told it to the "bad adults" from the other night. Did

that mean he intended to do it all on his own? Because no matter what he was trying to do...

"No apologizing, okay?" she said. "And no matter what happens, I'll be there for you."

"Um, right."

Good, good, she thought, but that was wrong.

"You're disobeying."

After a pause, her brother responded.

"Ohh, I don't understand. Everything you're saying is so confusing, sis. What's this all about?"

"Yes, yes. That's more like it."

After all...

"Everyone is accepting the trouble you cause because you're 'hopeless', so if you apologize and say you know it's a lot of trouble, it makes us question why we're accepting it in the first place. ...No one is accepting it so you'll apologize. It's so you can accomplish your goal as best as possible, so if you apologize, it makes it look like we helped you do something bad."

But...

"You can't thank us either. Because there are times when doing that would mean we helped you commit a crime. The people accepting you as 'hopeless' are casually doing so even though we know what you're doing."

"Umm, what does that mean?"

That one made it sound like he honestly did not understand, which worried her a bit.

But Kimi thought back to Asama before they entered the purification spring.

...Silly girl.

Asama trusted her and her brother head on.

Of course, she did not forget to question the things they did, she scolded

them when they needed scolding, and she would stop them when necessary. So it was not that she was dependent on them.

...But she's decided to trust us in the very end.

She intended to support them even if someone abandoned them or everyone else turned their backs on them.

Kimi and her brother could not take advantage of that support.

If they did, they would grow dependent on her.

She trusted them on that final line, so...

"Trust in yourself, foolish brother. You, me, and everyone else have something worthy of that inside us."

Also...

"You cause us all sorts of trouble. And we'll respond accordingly."

"Yeah, can I ask about something similar? It isn't about me, though."

"Who is it about?"

"Chuuko."

"You really shouldn't do that with girls' names. Even if she does it herself."

But...

"So what about that Student Council President?"

"Well, um, she said something similar. ...She said we were sharing a way of life."

Hearing that made Kimi think.

...That girl.

They had spent a long time cultivating her brother's territory and way of life. She wanted to avoid having anyone outside of their group interfering in that, but...

...She is surprisingly sharp.

Kimi looked to the side.

Mitotsudaira, Asama, and Kimi herself each shared a lot between themselves and with her brother. It was not that any of them was their leader. They had simply gone ahead with what they wanted to do and who they naturally were and that had coincided with and fit in with what her brother wanted.

Her brother was currently trying to add something new into that.

He was trying to add that girl who was "nothing" and had a unique sort of individuality.

Of course, since her individuality did not coincide with anyone else's, who took precedence would depend on how you looked at it.

But...

"This is getting bigger. Big enough that a band of international porn game smugglers seems insignificant in comparison."

His dreams were growing bigger.

And they felt especially large compared to when he had wanted to lose everything.

"But you know what, foolish brother?"

"What, sis?"

"That isn't enough to surprise me. I mean, I can understand this much. I'm looking down on it from an even higher point, saying 'Is that all?' "

"Ohh, then I've gotta remember to dream even bigger."

"What will you be doing?"

"Well, I'll be starting a new part-time job tomorrow. My savings are gone and I'll only be buying the games from now on."

His dreams suddenly seemed to have shrunk, but that was fine.

It meant he had balance.

So Kimi decided to say one last thing.

"You need to find a way to thank Asama for purifying all that. Just make sure she doesn't notice. ...Okay?"

With that, Kimi closed the sign frame.

She was surrounded by darkness. That bluish-black world could seem frightening.

But she could hear the steady breathing of her sleeping friends.

And she had heard her brother's words.

"How lovely."

She placed a hand on her chest to keep her many feelings from escaping and she shut her eyes.

Chapter 2: Panicked One in the Testing Room

第二章

『試験場の慌て者』



あ、あれ——？
あれあれあれ？
あれれれれれ？
配点（白熱）

H-huh?

Huh, huh, huh?

Huhhhhhh?

Point Allocation (Incandescence)

“Ga-chan? It’s almost 6. The morning bell is ringing, so you need to wake up.”

A voice spoke in a wood-floored room.

It was Naito’s voice. The 10 square meter room had a wide loft bed near the ceiling.

Two desks were installed side by side on the opposite wall. In the back was an oven burner capable of cooking Technohexen food and the pot on the burner was boiling water.

In front of that pot, Naito was wrapped in a blanket and removing the bandage from her left hand. The Asama Shrine bandage now lying on the desk had spell charms woven into it and the white cloth still had some ether light in it.

"Ohh, we can still use this..."

When she saw the glowing bandage, Naito thought, *Asama-chi sure is considerate.*

...Cleaning up the shrine grounds isn't enough to make up for this...

She felt pathetic when she realized they also owed Asama for the location and for feeding them. They had mostly just gone with what worked at the moment that evening, so...

"Yes."

The water had boiled, so she poured it into a washtub.

"How are you feeling?"

She looked up to the top bunk.

There was a ladder leading to that bed. It was usually moved aside since they rarely used it, but a butt was currently descending it.

The black-winged figure was wrapped in a blanket. Both the wings and the blanket hid her body, but when descending a ladder backwards, the swaying of her wings gave occasional glimpses of her butt.

...Oh...

That could easily be summed up as "cute", but there was something about it that made Naito stare.

Also, Naruze was not using her left arm.

"Are you okay, Ga-chan?"

"I jumped down like usual on the first day and just about died from the pain on impact, but today I'm doing better than yesterday. I think I can manage."

She looked back and smiled a little when she saw Naito's spread hand.

"Asama always works to help us out without even thinking about the cost, doesn't she?"

Naito stuck her hand in the washtub while watching Naruze reach the floor and approach.

Her hand had been bandaged up for about three days, so not only did it need washing, but...

"Ohh, it itches so bad."

"Yeah, the circulation was cut off, wasn't it?"

"It feels like my finger bones are stuck together. If I bend them...ow, ow, ow, ow."

When she suddenly bent the fingers, they felt like they were breaking. But...

"Oh, the back of the hand is okay though."

When she opened and closed her hand side to side instead of top to bottom, feeling gradually returned to her fingertips. Her pale hand quickly regained its color.

"Did the bandage have a divine protection for stabilizing circulation?"

"I think it might have," said Naito as she lifted her hand from the hot water.

She could move it. It was awkward and slow, but her will could definitely reach it.

...Okay.

She used her right hand to cover her left hand and bend the fingers. That made her left hand feel like she had grabbed a bunch of needles. The joints protested and provided pain to tell her not to bend them any further.

But she bent them anyway.

The joints moved. She heard a small pop and they bent.

She straightened them again and she could move them. It was slow, but more than before.

"Margot, you're sweating."

"Eh?"

She looked back to see Naruze holding a handkerchief. Her body relaxed as Naruze wiped off her forehead.

"Ga-chan, I can see your boobs."

"That's fine."

"Want to see mine?"

"Don't force yourself."

She felt like Naruze was making an assumption there, but she also felt like Naruze was not. *Maybe I just want her to pamper me*, she analyzed, but that thought itself may have been a way of distracting herself from her tension.

Her left hand started feeling chilled again, so she soaked it in the hot water and felt the itchiness reach the very core this time.

"You can move it, can't you?"

Naruze was right. She could move it top to bottom now.

She moved the fingers in a slow but spider-like way and then sighed.

...Ah.

She realized the water did not feel as hot as when she started. Which meant...

"Okay, looks like I'm doing better now."

"Then help me out," said Naruze with a smile as she removed the blanket from her shoulders. "I can't soak this in hot water, though."

"Don't you think we could use a heating spell to make a hot wet towel?"

"Probably, but I don't want to do the first experiment here. If I free my arm and keep it in a sling, I should be able to move it by the time the exams are over at the academy."

She looked to a corner of the room.

Their brooms and the instruments they had borrowed from the Asama Shrine were there.

"It's finally time. I'm betting Wild Kamelie will make her move once the festival begins, but before that..."

Naruze waved the left shoulder of her blanket toward Naito.

"Will you help me get dressed?"

Below the white sky of the stealth barrier surrounding the Musashi, P-01s watched the movement of several winds.

This was her morning tuning. She would sing at the graveyard and then return.

As she walked from Okutama to Tama, she passed by a linked series of carts, laborers carrying things, and gods of war hurrying to their posts.

At one point, a female god of war wearing red armored clothing cut across in front of her.

"?"

A wagon that was passing by crashed into a nearby water bucket. The bucket split open, the water splashed out, and the wagon's load of wood spilled out.

More importantly, after gathering everyone's attention...

"You moron! Look where you're going! Were you distracted by the Suzaku's ass!?"

"Not its ass! It's panties!"

"Those aren't panties..."

P-01s thought to herself as she listened to the laughter and the leaving god of war's footsteps.

...I am glad everything is so lively this morning.

Just like her, these people had to be moving about in the morning to optimize themselves.

They could sort through their memories while sleeping, but this was about optimizing themselves for their daily life the following morning.

...You can only do that after waking up.

There was no difference between those who stayed silent and those who spoke.

It could only be done by waking up in the morning and moving around. Also...

"————"

The wind was blowing.

Some people had watched that commotion from the sky.

It was the delivery Technohexen and the other travelers of the sky. Some of them did work for the Blue Thunder. The standard deliveries of flour or fruit were done on land, but they would use the air route if they ran out and needed more in a hurry.

Those people flew along as the wind blew.

...Come to think of it...

"I have not seen Maruze-sama or Marzet-sama since they were at the cafe the other day."

She had seen them before that visit. She had only learned their names on that

visit, but since arriving on the Musashi, she would occasionally see those combinations of gold and black or black and white, which was all very confusing.

"Which one is which?"

She had asked the manager about it before:

"Um. I sometimes see these gold and black girls in the sky and they are so easy to get confused."

"Oh, them? You can tell them apart by the chest."

The fact that that worked showed just how well-made Musashi's boobs caste system was.

Based on the customers she had seen, Asama of the Asama Shrine was at the top.

...And I think Kimi-sama would come next.

The color black flew by overhead.

It was not someone she recognized.

...But her speed rivals or surpasses Nargot-sama's.

The Technohexen was flying toward the bow.

"————"

P-01s looked back, but her eyes could not keep up.

She came to a stop and looked past the building roofs.

"Is that zwoosh how she optimizes herself in the morning?"

P-01s resumed walking toward Tama.

Mornings at Musashi Ariadust Academy began at 8:30.

After calling role and a quick homeroom, the first class began. From there, it was a series of 50-minute classes and 10-minute breaks, but...

"Okay, this is the last day of exams, so stay focused and make it through to

the end."

Class 2-Plum was in full attendance and their homeroom teacher's voice rang through the classroom.

She wore a track suit, placed the exam papers on the lectern, and bent forward to look at them all.

"First up for today will be health/PE."

"Teacher Oriotorai. May I ask something?"

It was a tall boy on the front row who raised his hand. He asked his question without lowering his hand.

"Can I buy the answers with money?"

"Shirojiro, I'll overlook that since you were so upfront about it, but I didn't make this exam."

"Are you saying money would be sufficient if you had made the exam?"

"I suppose it would be fine if it was an exam to see if you could get by in life."

"Judge." Shirojiro lowered his hand. "I will remember that."

"He's serious..." muttered the disturbed class, but their homeroom teacher only smiled a little.

"Well, since we have health/PE and classical literature today, this should be the easier of the two. Oh, but you will have to draw some diagrams, so you can use the divine network for this one."

"Really?"

"What's this, Mitotsudaira? Do you want to make the exam harder?"

"Um, no," said Mitotsudaira with a shake of the head.

She had no objection to an easier exam. But...

"That is an awfully big favor you're doing us."

Oriotorai nodded at that expression of surprise.

"Yeah, but it looks like it's covering material past what we've covered."

Makes sense, thought Mitotsudaira as she saw movement out of the left corner of her vision.

Adele was gesturing toward her from the second row.

She seemed to be saying, "Keep this going!"

Adele was Catholic. Her sign frames could connect to Musashi's divine network, but she would need to set things up right. Masazumi had a different problem here, so she raised her hand.

She did not even have a sign frame contract, so Asama immediately raised her hand as well.

"Masazumi, I'll give you a guest sign frame, so use that. ...Just write your name in the first entry field."

After a single clap, Hanami made a tossing motion and a sign frame appeared in front of Masazumi.

It asked her a question:

<Who the hell are you?>

Masazumi turned to look their way, so Asama and Mitotsudaira both nodded.

"It's asking for your name."

Masazumi began typing with her index fingers. She hesitated a bit with the kanji conversion, but managed.

"Honda Masazumi."

<...Hmm. ...So whaddya want?>

"Divine transmission! Divine transmission, Masazumi!"

"Divine transmission."

<Ho ho? And you expect me to believe you're *not* here to see my daughter?

> *What on earth is this?* wondered Mitotsudaira just before Asama explained.

"Oh, sorry. I sent you one in anti-stalker mode. During the Heian period, there were a lot of people who would come to the gate with tears staining their

cheeks who claimed they would die if they could not see the god, so the settings are pretty strict."

"Give a normal one to a beginner!!"

Mitotsudaira could not agree more. But that had apparently bought them enough time. Adele gave her and Asama a thumbs up, but Asama only looked confused. Mitotsudaira smiled at how Asama nodded despite also tilting her head.

Then the exam papers were passed out.

This was the health/PE exam.

After this and the classical literature exam, they would only have the Spring School Festival to look forward to.

Mitotsudaira had a thought as she watched everyone put away their study notes and textbooks and then open their sign frames.

...In a way, this is where our second year will truly begin...

Mitotsudaira flipped over the exam paper.

They only had to wait until Oriotorai said "begin", but there was movement around her.

...How is this going to turn out?

Midterm exams had a large effect on their final grades. They were an important event for marking out their lives as students.

If "time" for a student was seen as a collection of official records, then exam results were what gave shape to that.

Of course, they had even more forms of records if their club activities, committee activities, the Student Council, or the Chancellor's Officers were included, but grades really were the definitive records for all students and those were formed from the exams.

These exams marked the end of the first term that had begun their second year. They also led into the Spring School Festival which ended with the Gagaku

Festival, so...

...You can really feel the flow of time.

She had a feeling she had wanted that in the past.

She had wanted to grow up and she had wanted to rid herself of who she had been.

But that had somewhat changed more recently. She now wanted to "take action" as soon as possible.

"...Yes."

A king and a knight.

But the king had yet to take action.

The most he was doing was showing interest in that Blue Thunder automaton. Mitotsudaira could tell his interest came from a forward-looking perspective and not a backwards-looking one, but...

...Has he forgotten his promise with me?

She hated how she was so clearly pouting. A knight was not supposed to let such emotions get the better of her.

But, she prefaced in her heart.

How long am I supposed to wait?

The business she had started was doing well recently and she was gaining more opportunities for socializing. That was thanks to her connection with Hexagone Française and her provisional status as 1st in line to ruling the Far East. Because Matsudaira Motonobu, the Far East's ruler, was still alive, that was a delicate issue that could not be addressed too openly, but there were corporations and individuals secretly working to establish a connection with her.

She was starting to wonder why she bothered implicitly deterring and rejecting those things.

...I wish he would look my way more often.

And just as she thought that...

"!"

The Cerberus on her head barked.

Was she trying to cheer her up? But the bark rang loud through the quiet classroom.

"Sorry."

That comment to everyone's gathered attention allowed her to break free of her own negative thoughts.

I need to change my focus, she thought.

Time would continue to pass. If nothing happened, you could call it a standstill, but that also meant it had not ended.

...Honestly.

When she bowed toward the others, she glanced over and saw him looking out the window.

The 2nd year classrooms were on the 3rd floor of the rear school building, so they had a good view of the sky.

But Musashi's sky was covered by the stealth barrier.

Even so, he was staring intently at that sky beyond the Techonhexen, other delivery workers, and transport ships.

...How does he see it?

Was he motionlessly waiting for something to happen, like she was?

Or was he planning to do something?

Then she heard a voice: Oriotorai's.

"Okay...begin!"

Asama opened a sign frame as soon as the exam began.

According to Oriotorai...

"I'm blocking any divine mails or similar communication methods. And I'll set

an alarm with the classroom divine protection. Um, Asama, no deactivating this no matter how nicely they ask, okay?"

"Eh? Oh, yes. Of course!"

As proof, she altered the classroom divine protection settings herself. Specifically, for any personal communications.

"If you try any of that, it'll make a weird yell, so be careful, everyone."

She opened a sign frame saying "Forbidden" up in the air.

But doing that had somewhat delayed her start.

She glanced over and saw the others hunched over their exam papers. Some of them had sign frame light shining on them, so they must have been searching something on the divine network.

...I need to hurry.

This was the health/PE exam. They had studied for this the night before after coaxing Kimi into it.

Disease treatments, the purpose of the family, and other things were generally asked in essay questions. And "explaining" things like that was Asama's specialty.

So after writing her name, she looked to the first question.

...Now, then!

She looked down and read the handwritten text.

<Question 1: What different types of male-female combination techniques are there? Give their names and a simple explanation.>

Suzu heard an odd noise.

It was too short to be a breath. As a sound effect, it would probably be presented as "Gulp...!" That "...!" seemed important. But was there anything to gulp about here? Also...

...Asama...-san?

Her ears detected Asama with both elbows up on the desk.

The slight heat source revealed that her body temperature had quickly dropped and then even more rapidly risen.

Why was that?

Had something happened?

But Suzu could not say anything. They were taking an exam.

Instead, she only thought to herself while reading the exam paper with the reading pen attached to Noise Neighbor.

...I-is she...okay...?

...They can't ask this, can they!? They just can't!

What different types are there? What is that supposed to mean?

And give their names? Like, the names of the techniques...or the positions I guess they would be?

And...

...A simple explanation?

Like the positions you take? The movements you make? Or the end result?

"————"

Asama concluded this could not be right, so she raised her hand.

"U-um, Sensei?"

"Oh? What is it? Did someone break the rules? But I didn't hear a weird yell alarm. Did they receive a physical punishment?"

Hearing that, the idiot shot to his feet.

He spread his legs and held his butt from the front and the back to check.

"I-it's still alive...!"

A sheathed long sword flew over and hit him.

The idiot flipped once and everyone made an "ahh..." face.

While she walked over to collect her sword, Oriotorai turned toward Asama

with a smile.

"Did something happen?"

"No. It's just this exam." She tried asking. "Are you...sure this is what we're supposed to be tested on?"

"Judge, I am."

Oriotorai did not hesitate to answer. She picked up her sword and kicked the idiot and his chair back upright.

"Although it does cover some material we didn't get to yet."

Asama indeed did not remember covering this in class.

But if that was how it was, then *that was how it was*.

...*Wow*.

Asama weakly slumped back in her chair.

"Under...stood."

She had to do this.

Masazumi focused on Asama as she operated the borrowed sign frame.

Asama, who was Masazumi's divine transmission sponsor, seemed a little out of it, but she soon got back to her exam paper.

...*Does Asama like this kind of thing, even though she's a shrine maiden?*

Masazumi tilted her head and looked back to her exam paper since she could hear Oriotorai walking back to the front of the classroom.

She focused on the first question.

<Question 1: What different types of male-female combination techniques are there? Give their names and a simple explanation.>

Asama considered the question.

Combination techniques. She was supposed to provide some different types and she could think of some examples.

In Shinto, having many offspring was encouraged. When Izanagi and Izanami, who had created the Far East in the distant past, had split up due to one hell of a fight, Izanami had become history's first monster woman and made an announcement: "I'm gonna kill 1000 people every day. I'm totally gonna do it."

And Izanagi had given his response:

"I'm gonna make 1500 new people every day~ I'm totally gonna do it~"

Some saw that as Izanagi announcing that he was going to cheat on her *like crazy*, but it was also accepted as a story that encouraged population growth.

...In the Sim Heian game, you have to increase your population by 500 every day, which is not easy.

Moving the Izanami slider toward the "castration" side would reduce that number and make your residents go to sleep earlier, but then their stress would build up. And as someone training in Shinto, Asama wanted to avoid messing with the settings of the gods.

But even with that encouragement and even with Shinto's many available genres, there was no clear statement on what "combination techniques" were superior or common.

...N-normally, you do it like that, right?

"Right..."

Even in the exam question, male-female was written with the character for "man" on top.^[1] *Yes, that's how it works. The language is subliminally instilling us with knowledge of combination techniques. But I mustn't think about the character for "torment".*^[2] *The woman is sort of the core system for that combination.*

But, thought Asama.

Is it really right for the man to be on top like in "male-female"?

...H-hm?

She had a question about the combination process.

Considering how Part A had to combine with Part B, the combinations were

generally divided into vertical and horizontal combinations. Diagonals did not come up much.

And if you limited your focus to just the combining parts, the combinations were almost all horizontal. There were vertical ones, but there was little variation there and the direct exposure to the effects of gravity probably made those difficult for beginners.

So if she looked at the "the character for man on top of the character for woman" structure as a horizontal combination, what did it represent?

When drawing a diagram while looking at it from above, *the front end was the viewpoint.*

In this case, *the character for woman was in the front*, so...

...It's from the woman's point of view...!

Mitotsudaira heard Asama's chair move from some reflexive action of hers.

What could have surprised her like that? It reminded Mitotsudaira of something Neshinbara often did.

...It was like she was shouting "What...!?"

Had she made some kind of strange discovery?

This was the health/PE exam. That should have been easy for Asama. That felt like an assumption, but Mitotsudaira also did not see how she could be wrong.

At any rate, she thought while filling in her exam sheet.

That was a close one, thought Asama while mentally sweating.

She had nearly fallen for a simple trap.

Yes, the Testament described a world of male domination and female subjugation, but equal rights for men and women had been the norm since the Age of the Gods. So when discussing combinations, wasn't it best to view it from the perspective of the one who would carry the greater burden afterwards?

...I see...!

Asama started thinking up a simple explanation to give, but she was not confident she could convey this properly without a diagram. And if she got too lurid, her exam paper would have to be restricted to adults only.

Also, her feminine heart wanted to obscure the emotional side and convey things as cutely as possible.

That's right, she thought.

...It might be best to compare it to cute animals.

So she began writing her example using animals.

"First, the woman gets on all fours like a dog."

...This is already sounding lurid! Shinto why!?

The whole idea was for the animal comparison to make it sound cuter, so what was this?

Besides, that was not the combination she should be writing about first. With combinations from behind, she had heard it was hard for the controllers of Part A and Part B to match their speed since they could not see each other's faces.

...They need to be facing each other. I need to start with one of those!

But she probably did need to check on the "from behind" types. Because...

...There are people like Mito.

Mitotsudaira was a Loup-Garou. She was Shinto, but that was partially because Shinto had accepted her style. Shinto was accommodating. Not lax, accommodating.

So in Mitotsudaira's case...

"Nh?"

Was she answering her exam using "from behind" combinations?

Mitotsudaira felt an odd gaze on her from behind and to the right.

That was near where Asama sat.

...It's Tomo, isn't it?

She had noticed Asama was no longer moving, but when she glanced over her shoulder, it looked like the shrine maiden was staring at her.

...Wh-what is this about?

Did she want some kind of help?

But they were taking an exam and Asama was not the type to try to cheat.

So Mitotsudaira lightly touched the Cerberus on her head.

"O-oh, what's the matter?"

...That was such an obvious act...!

She pretended the Cerberus was falling backwards so she could look back.
And...

...Tomo?

Mitotsudaira saw it in that instant.

Asama was facing her and miming grabbing at something from the left and right in front of her hips.

...Is that...?

Based on the exam questions, that was probably meant to be holding someone from behind while they were on all fours.

So Mitotsudaira lowered her head while placing the Cerberus on her desk.

She nodded.

...I knew it!

Asama was deeply grateful to Mitotsudaira as she faced her exam paper once more.

...Thank goodness she's a dog!

No, that's not right. Well, it is, but I need to calm down some.

Besides, she could not use a dog. Or a cat. Those had too much of a greedy image. She needed an animal with a cleaner sort of virility. *Yes, like...*

"If the man is like a horse..."

No...!

She could not use a cow either. Cows were especially off limits. It would not be fair to Adele.

And she had to rule out goats and sheep because that felt like heading in a weird direction.

How about a smaller animal that would fit in her palm?

"A turtle..."

No. Definitely no. And a green turtle? Does it have matcha all over it or something?

Besides, she seemed to be straying from the woman's viewpoint idea. But if she was sticking with the animal swim team...

"The woman lies like a frog on its back."

She just about laughed out loud at the thought and she wondered if she could get through it all with animal comparisons. *No, probably not.*

She felt like the entire animal plan had failed.

Suzu sensed Asama continually writing, erasing, and sighing.

...I-is she...okay?

She seemed to be really enjoying what she was writing, but she also showed signs of astonished depression partway through writing whatever it was. That made it difficult to figure out.

But after a few repetitions of that cycle, she seemed to arrive at the right answer.

She finally sighed and muttered to herself.

"Yes, it's only humans that do this."

Suzu gave a silent nod of agreement. She was fairly certain it was indeed only humans that "did this". But...

"Ah."

She heard Asama break her cokepen.

"———"

After collapsing onto her desk, Asama pulled a new pen out of her pencil box. Then she moved onto the second question.

<Question 2: What kind of technique is "The Sailboat". Draw a diagram.>

"Oh, Asama? Why are you bumping your chair around again?"

Masazumi heard Asama give an "ah" of surprise after partially standing up. Asama waved her sleeves and hands around behind her.

"Um, I-I was just prepping myself to answer a difficult question. Ah ha ha ha." Asama sat back down while dryly laughing.

Masazumi realized no one else was reacting to that action or sound.

...So is this normal?

With that thought, she looked at the second question.

<Question 2: What kind of technique is "The Sailboat". Draw a diagram.>

What kind of technique was that again?

...I-I know this one! I do! It has to be that one, right!?

Asama quickly began drawing the diagram.

"U-Umm."

After drawing the upper body of the woman lying on her side, Asama realized something.

...I'm clearly just drawing myself here.

And it's actually a really good drawing! she added, but Naruze's was probably far better. *But*, she thought while looking at the drawing of her face. *I should probably do the expression right.*

"Nh..."

How well could she draw that kind of expression on her own face? *Well, I'm an amateur, so you can't expect too much from me. Plus...*

...No one's looking in a mirror...

That was probably because it would look like they were trying to copy off of the person behind them.

So Asama set to work on the version of herself on the paper.

...W-would it be...like this?

She felt like she had drawn too many slanted blush lines on her cheeks, but it was within the margin of error. However...

"U-umm."

The Sailboat.

She was pretty sure she knew what that was.

Before, the girls had been going a little nuts over a women's magazine with an article on that kind of thing. That had ended badly since Kimi had grabbed Asama's body between her legs and shouted "Like this!? Like this, right!?", but amazingly, that experience was coming in handy here.

After she finished drawing the Part A on her side with legs spread, she started drawing the Part B, but she suddenly stopped.

There was no mistaking the drawing of the man.

...Huh? This...

It was him.

She had probably just subconsciously drawn a familiar face and it would have helped that the male body she drew with feminine lines resembled his bodylines a fair bit.

"———"

What am I doing? she wondered, but it was too late to redraw it now. That would ruin the drawing's balance.

Besides, this was an exam. Meaning...

...Yes, only our teacher will see it, so it'll be fine!

And I'm a shrine maiden while he's a nudist pervert. Our shticks don't work together at all.

That's right. This is nothing more than me using him as a sample nudist when drawing someone in the nude. What's wrong with drawing a nudist when nudity is called for? Right?

...So there's nothing wrong with this at all!

But she started feeling uneasy after finishing the drawing.

She began wondering if this was right.

This was The Sailboat she remembered and she was confident about that, but it was worth checking.

So...

"...Um."

She opened a sign frame and made a search on the divine net.

...S-a-i-l-b-o-a-t.

She made sure to add the keyword R-Genpuku, switch the "moral restrictions" to off, and select the image search.

And from the very first result...

"Eh?"

She was wrong.

"Oh, Asama? Why are you bumping your chair around again?"

Asama gave Oriotorai some dry laughter and then collapsed onto her desk.

Then she lowered her head between her elbows until her forehead reached her chest.

...I was wrong!?

What she had thought was The Sailboat was actually a pine-style technique.

...H-huhhh!?

The Sailboat was much more acrobatic. There was simply no way the human body could pull that off, so she was fairly certain it would require gravitational control. But...

"R-right."

This was something that would test your knowledge. The correct answer would be hard to imagine from the name.

So Asama took a breath and refocused her mind.

She did not like the idea of completely redoing all that work, but if she did not earn enough points here, she might not be able to perform in the Gagaku Festival.

She had to do it.

So she grabbed her compressed bread to erase her previous masterpiece. But...

...Uuh.

That image of her and him was so well composed that it felt like a shame to erase it.

"U-um, Sensei."

"Ah? What is it, Asama?"

"Can I take a picture of my exam paper?"

"For comparing answers afterwards? Then go ahead."

Asama thanked Oriotorai and took a commemorative photo. Everyone else did the same thing. Since Adele clenched her right fist toward Asama below her

desk but without looking back, that must have been a good idea.

Asama then worked at erasing the combination diagram using the compressed bread.

"H-huh?"

It would not erase. No matter how hard she rubbed at it...

...I-it isn't erasing?

Wondering if it had been locked down, she pressed the upper right corner of the exam paper, but then she realized something: *This isn't a sign frame*. Which meant...

"Uuh..."

She was not holding a cokepen. She was holding a Western pen that used permanent ink.

She had forgotten she had pulled that out after breaking her cokepen earlier.

...W-wahh!

She could not erase it.

Writing down the wrong answer was fairly common, but drawing out the wrong combination had to be pretty rare.

...Kh...!

She had no choice but to start blotting it out.

...U-umm, I'll start with the combination area. ...Wait, now it just looks like a censorship bar!!

That was the wrong approach. She had to cover up all of it.

Diagonal lines were not enough. She had to blot out the entire thing. But that was a large area for such a small pen tip. However...

"...!"

The smell of ink wafted up as she blotted it out. She was thorough, to ensure none of her drawn lines would show through.

...O-okay, now to actually get started!

She finally got to work on the second question.

Mitotsudaira finished answering and took a breath.

The exam had been unexpectedly easy. Their teacher may have been being kind to those of them participating in the Gagaku Festival or helping out with the other festival activities. But...

...Tomo?

She had heard Asama writing away on her exam paper for a while now.

She seemed to be taking this very seriously. She was positioned at a shallow angle diagonally back from Mitotsudaira, so it was easy to take a casual glance back. By pretending to look after the Cerberus, she peeked back and saw Asama completely hanging her head and blushing as she worked.

But then someone took a sudden action. It was Oriotorai.

She checked the wall clock and then clapped her hands twice.

“Okay, let’s end the exam there.”

Asama gasped as she snapped out of her focused state of mind.

...Th-that was fast!

She had answered all ten questions. The three-person and four-person combination questions had been difficult and she was still not sure if she should have used people she knew just because they were easier for her to draw. All of them but him were girls, but they essentially had a mental one of those, so it worked out.

The last question asked for the meaning of combinations.

“S-Sensei, wait just a second!”

“You sure are causing trouble with this one.”

Asama ignored that and wrote down the last part of her answer.

“Consent between both parties is key.”

...That should about do it.

She sighed, set down her pen, and faced forward. She saw the wall clock there.

“...Huh?”

Only 20 minutes had passed since the start time.

A single period was 50 minutes, so that was less than half the time. So why was the exam already over?

“U-um, Sensei, did you read the time wrong? Only 20 minutes have passed.”

“That’s right,” said Oriotorai. “This is the health/PE exam, so it’s split into two different exams. This was the PE one.”

“...Eh?”

Asama felt like she had taken a serious misstep, but she decided to ask anyway.

“About this exam...aren’t combination techniques...taking it too far?”

“Oh, yeah.” Oriotorai opened a sign frame showing the fall schedule. “The questions about the group gymnastic formations done at the fall athletic festival, right? It looks like they threw those on the exam since there wasn’t much else to ask about, but it was moving ahead too far.”

“...Eh?”

Asama grew borderline unresponsive and Oriotorai nodded.

“Okay, time to hand in your exams. Going by class number, Asama would be first.”

Mitotsudaira saw Asama tear her exam to pieces.

“Nwaaaaaaaaahh!!”

More than panicked, she seemed like she had no choice but to tear the paper into tiny, tiny pieces, so Mitotsudaira asked what this was about.

“T-Tomo!? What’s the matter!? Is it your usual sickness!?”

“Huh!? Did you just say something awful!?”

Asama looked back, but she continued tearing apart the paper as she did.

“U-umm.”

Finally, she seemed to realize everyone was focused on her. She gathered up the shreds of paper on her desk and frantically covered them up with her arms.

“U-um, I found a wicked thoughts mysterious phenomenon, but I managed to seal it up!”

“Wicked thoughts?”

“Y-yes! That’s right! A bit of that one from the other day got into the classroom, yes! So I sealed it in my exam paper and tore it apart!”

Someone nodded at Asama’s explanation: Oriotorai.

She glared at her student.

“Ho ho?”

“Ah, wh-what is that look for, Sensei!?”

“So, Asama. ...What was that photo you took earlier for?”

“Eh!?”

Asama definitely froze in place for five seconds.

Then she got up with sweat covering her face.

“Th-that was to photograph the process of capturing the wicked thoughts. I thought I could use that as proof that I had captured it!”

“Ho ho. Then could you let me see that photo?”

“Aeh!?”

Asama froze in place for another five seconds.

And just as she started again with another “um” ...

“Sensei!!”

Someone spoke from behind her.

...My king?

That was exactly who had raised his hand.

Mitotsudaira looked back to see a serious look on his face.

“I thought this exam was asking about *that* kind of combination and I went all in on drawing the diagrams, so how many points can I get for effort!? They’re even uncensored!”

A long sword flew and sent the idiot flying.

While the idiot flew, Asama stuffed the shredded exam paper up her sleeve.

...I-I’m saved!!

But then a small object struck the left side of her head.

It was a paper airplane. She looked over and saw it had to have come from Kimi.

What is this about? she wondered as she caught it before it reached the ground. She unfolded it to read what it said: “*Same shtick?*”

She wrote “No!” and threw it back, but the girl narrowed her eyes in a smile and waved a hand back and forth. As if to say she need not pretend.

...Honestly.

Asama focused on ignoring her and took a breath.

At any rate, she had destroyed the evidence. This meant she had not answered any of the questions, but...

“Sensei? Um, this next one is the health exam, right?”

“Eh? Yes, it is. ...Is that okay with you, Asama?”

“Oh, yes! That’s fine! I’ll get a good score on this one!”

“Is that so?”

Oriotorai collected the exams while retrieving her sword and then she passed out the health exam papers.

“You can start once you pass them back, okay? Just like before, you have 20 minutes. Okay, begin.”

Asama focused on the exam paper she held.

...I have to recover my score with this!

She nodded and then read the first question.

<Question 1: What different types of male-female combination techniques are there? Give their names and a simple explanation.>

“Sensei! This is the same! It’s the same exam as before!”

“No, it isn’t. The title says ‘Health’ this time, right? ...Okay, begin.”

Kimi burst out laughing and Asama hung her head and began the exam along with everyone else.

“Ahh...”

...The students in Aki are taking their exams right now too, aren’t they?

Rome existed somewhat southwest from the center of Itsukushima in Aki.

The Papa-Schola’s K.P.A.S. was an academy attended only by their officers and the committees that worked under them, so it looked like a large cathedral.

To the side of the white cathedral’s entrance, several chairs were lined up on a lawn surrounded by a rose hedge.

The Papa-Schola and everyone else were taking an exam below the blue sky.

The exam papers sat on tall writing desks and a high priest teacher was watching their every move.

One person among them sat with a view of the ocean.

That was Papa-Schola Innocentius.

He held a cokepen worn down quite short and he wrote out his answers on the exam paper.

They were taking a history exam.

“Question: Explain why Charles VII of France found the Maid of Orleans.”

<Answer: Nothing is unknown to Catholic knowledge.>

“Question: After the Anglo-French war, France attempted to temporarily transfer their autonomy to the King of England due to domestic chaos. Name that king.”

<Answer: The Papa-Schola knows the answer, so that is not a problem.>

“Question: The Papa-Schola’s simultaneously younger and older stepsister Olimpia is great, isn’t she?”

<Answer: Are you screwing with me?>

Innocentius thought to himself as he answered.

...Isn’t this a little too easy? Hm?

Catholicism was history itself. And all Catholic knowledge was available to the Papa-Schola. Thus...

“As the Papa-Schola, I have to answer as ‘the Papa-Schola, representative of Catholicism’ and not with my own words. ...It would be dangerous if I got used to this. Don’t you think? Hm?”

“Former boy...do not speak to me during the exam.”

“Oh, the answer to that one is Malta.”

“Um, Papa-Schola? That would count as cheating, so please stop...”

“Oh, my bad, my bad.” Innocentius waved a hand dismissively. “Even if making a mistake would sully the Papa-Schola’s name, this really isn’t necessary. I’m jealous of the popes from before the Harmonic Unification War.”

“But thanks to that, there were quite a few idiot popes back then, former boy.”

“Nowadays they just cover up whether we’re idiots or not.”

Innocentius muttered “honestly” as he looked up into the sky.

The Musashi would be in the eastern sky. He could tell it was there since he would occasionally see a transport ship vanish in the middle of the sky, but...

“Musashi should be taking their exams now too, shouldn’t they?”

He spoke to himself while flipping over his exam paper and jotting down ideas for new warrior spells.

“They’re hiding, but I bet there’s some kind of craziness going on there. Don’t you think? Hm?”

“Oh, sorry, everyone. That’s a misprint. ...The health exam was printed on the back, so answer that one. Looks like they were printed on the backs of some other exams.”

“Ehhhh!?! But I just finished drawing it all!!”

In the usual pattern, everyone looked to Asama and she had to make an excuse.

The exam time was extended as long as possible, so the end was delayed by half an hour. But once they finished the classical literature exam after that...

“Heh heh. We’re finally free! Oh, Asama, what’s with you? Are you worried you failed the health/PE exam because you have a guaranteed zero on the PE part? You’d better not have. If you failed, you can’t perform in the Gagaku Festival.”

“Kwaaaaah! It’s my own fault, but it really ticks me off when you say it!”

At any rate, everyone was in a festive mood.

Chapter 3: Gift Giver in the Shrine Bar

第三章

『境内酒場の引き出者』



それは息抜きと言うより
別事への真剣で
配点（気持ちの切り替え）

That is less of a breather

And more of an earnestness for a different matter

Point Allocation (Refocus Your Feelings)

The Musashi's sky was transitioning from evening to night.

At this time, there was a greater contrast between the whiteness of the stealth barrier wall and the darkness outside it. And someone noted a certain fact while looking up into that sky.

"There are an awful lot of delivery workers out today."

That comment came from Sakai as he descended the stairs in front of the academy.

He was followed by "Okutama". She was using a "Tama"-style frame instead of a "Musashino"-style frame and she used her gravitational control to sweep the stairs behind her with a broom.

"I have determined that is due to the coming festival, Sakai-sama. People are likely making their final preparations. Over."

"Everyone has so much work to do, don't they?"

Sakai then turned his skyward gaze toward the bow.

A line of aerial buoys floated above Asakusa. They were normally used to inform foreign ships of the Musashi's route, but these had a different purpose.

"The delivery workers' Null Vier. Are they setting it up for anyone to try? ...Tamako, have they ever done that before?"

"According to 'Asakusa', the head of the delivery business decided to make it as exciting as possible since their rankings have changed so much this year. Over."

"Almirante-san, hm?" Sakai opened the *inro* hanging from his neck and dropped the *kiseru* parts into his hand. He quickly assembled them. "The Technohexen in our academy's 2nd year who are named after Naitou and Naruse are ranked 3rd, aren't they?"

"They moved up to 2nd the other night. Over."

"Did they? Then they might just make it to 1st next time."

"...Sakai-sama." "Okutama" glared at his back. "Why are you such a sore loser? Over."

Just as she said that, a silver line dropped from the sky. It instantly pierced her apron and stabbed into the stairs.

"...!? Over."

She tried to back away, but the back of the blade held the cloth in place. She was unable to move and Sakai looked back curiously.

He spoke when he saw the sword still vibrating as it stood from the stairs.

" 'Musashi'-san, will you not be visiting today?"

A sign frame opened in response.

It opened from the sword's pommel and displayed an image of "Musashi". She turned to face "Okutama", made sure that other automaton had been held back, and then faced Sakai once more.

"Musashi" bowed.

"My apologies, Sakai-sama. Even if overthrowing one's lord is common in this age, my management skills were clearly lacking if the captain of just one ship felt she had 'defeated' you in any way. ...You may slay her with the sword before you if you like. The choice is yours. Over."

" 'Musashi-san', you know very well I would never choose to do that."

Sakai crouched down to be on eye level with the sign frame and "Musashi" did not respond for several seconds. Eventually, she lightly brushed back her hair.

"I have determined you are someone who would strike someone down if necessary. Over."

"I just hope I haven't gotten rusty." He smiled bitterly. " 'Musashi'-san, the scabbard."

"Judge. Over."

When he heard her response, Sakai stood up and raised his left hand.

A moment later, a red-lacquered scabbard fell into that hand.

Once he heard it slap into his hand, he moved his fingers to spin it around. He then pulled out the sword piercing the automaton's skirt.

"And it's sheathed. ...Tamako."

"J-judge."

He tossed the sheathed sword to "Okutama". And without even checking to see if she had caught it, he picked up the sign frame displaying "Musashi".

"Use that to be my bodyguard."

"Sakai-sama, you are being too easy on her. Over."

"No, no. I'm going to have her watch my black disk of Future Destructor Jiraida."

Hearing that, "Okutama" hung her head a bit and "Musashi" went through the motions of a sigh.

"Sakai-sama, the festival begins tomorrow. I have determined we will be very busy, so please do not waste her time. Over."

"It sounds like it's going to be quite the festival."

"What makes you say that? Over."

"Well, earlier, Torii's group sent in their decision for the band order during the Gagaku Festival."

Sakai turned away from "Okutama" and descended the stairs.

"Which band do you think got the last performance?"

"Sakai-sama, when you ask for information I have yet to receive, I can only tell you that I do not know. Over."

"I see," said Sakai.

He glanced over at "Musashi" who followed him in the sign frame and then looked up into the stealth barrier sky that had some faint scarlet in it now. He finally gestured toward the bow with his chin.

"Well, I want to eat dinner on the bow deck, so take care of that, 'Musashi'-san. We can go over some things then."

Asama operated a sign frame while looking up into the evening sky covered by the Musashi's stealth barrier.

She was creating a barrier to surround the Asama Shrine.

That barrier prevented others from entering or leaving and it kept sounds and images from getting out.

"Okay." She took a breath and clapped her hands. "We will now submit the 1647 Term 1 Post-Exams Party held by the girls of Class 2-Plum!"

Mats were laid out across the shrine's grounds and the girls of Class Plum were seated on them. They all raised their sake cups and their voices as one.

"Submit!"

They all took a breath and began placing bags of snacks and bento boxes on the mats. Meanwhile, Naomasa set down a wooden container of fried rice and walked to the main shrine with her sake cup in hand.

Hanami was floating above a bench placed in front of the main shrine.

A sign frame appeared behind Hanami:

"Direct Connection: Sakuya: Connected"

Naomasa placed her sake cup on the bench below Hanami.

"Take care of it." She clapped her hands and spoke to Hanami. "I might be at the wrong place for this, but make it a prayer for safety."

"Clap."

Hanami clapped her hands and some ether light rose from the sake cup.

At the same time, the words "Received: Intermediary: Ame-no-Ma: Confirmed" appeared on the sign frame behind her.

Sakuya acted as an intermediary for her prayer to the technician's god Ame-

no-Ma.

Naomasa saw a sign frame appear next to her in response. It was...

...A formless spell charm.

The charm was made of ether instead of paper. Since it was not physically attached when used, the engine division could use that kind without interfering with any moving parts. That made them more valuable, but...

"Asama-chi, just how valuable is this sake?"

"I don't know... I made it myself, so I've never run an official calculation. But if it worked as a substitution, I must have gotten better at it."

"Is that how it works?" asked Masazumi.

Naomasa knew very little about that transfer student, but...

...Is she going to be someone important when she grows up?

Naomasa did not know if the two of them would have any kind of lasting connection, and she was not the type to go out of her way to build one. But she did think it would be mutually beneficial if they had some things in common.

"This is Asama-chi's *kamizake*."

Masazumi looked down at her cup, so Asama clarified.

"It has been purified, but if it still bothers you, you can use it as an offering like Masa did."

"No, um." Masazumi tilted her head. "Kami Sake? Is that a special Shinto drink?"

Hearing that, Naomasa put her false hand on her chin.

...Ahh.

This would be a pain to explain, so she looked to Asama who smiled bitterly.

"Simply put, saliva is used as a catalyst for the fermentation of the rice. So in this case, *kamizake* means chewed sake. It's possible to continue using the same seeds, but the older they get, the more you have to purify, so we remake them every year."

"Oh." Masazumi narrowed her eyes toward the cup in her hands. "My mom would put chewed herbs in when making sake, but I never knew why until now. ...I just always assumed it was some kind of custom or etiquette."

"Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! Are you hogging all of the sake made from your wife's sake seeds again!?"

"Of course I am, you fool! This is my wife's *kamizake* that has been aging in my hidden sake cellar! It is truly priceless! And nothing is more expensive than that which is free!"

"Th-then, Nobu-tan! What happened to your plan of extracting saliva from Masazumi-kun's leftover food and producing *kamizake* from that!?"

"Heh heh heh. Have a sip of this sake here, Koni-tan."

"...Mh. It's so good! Is this Masazumi-kun's *kamizake*!?"

"No, it is mine, you fool! Oh, but Masazumi is my daughter, so you could say it is nearly Masazumi's. Oh? Koni-tan? Why the glum look, hmmmmmmmmmm?"

"C-curse you. You tricked me into an indirect kiss with you, didn't you!?"

"My mom didn't drink, so I assume she sent it to my dad."

Suzu sensed Masazumi somewhat curling her back while turning away from the others.

...Is she...laughing?

It was the joyous laughter of someone who had run across something nostalgic. It just happened to include tears as well, so Masazumi felt the need to turn the other way.

And...

"Sorry. The air here sure is damp."

"Oh, it's fine. ...Because I can use that for a doujinshi."

"Wait! What are you planning!?"

"I mean..." Naruze nodded, juggled her pen between hands, and sometimes raised her left shoulder to check on it. "*Kamizake* is given to the person you like and waiting until later to tell them what it is, right? Well, that or feeding it to them mouth-to-mouth."

Asama waved her hand to say that was not what it was for, but was it really not?

"Asama-san...do you not...think about...that kind of thing?"

"N-no, I don't. Because this is holy sake. Yes."

Hearing that, Kimi took a drink from her cup.

She puffed out her cheeks, swished the sake around, and then swallowed it.

"Phew..." She relaxed her sitting position and held a hand to her cheek.

"Asama just roughly violated my mouth... She pumped it full of her hot stuff and rubbed it all around..."

"You made that joke before, didn't you!? Didn't you!?"

"But, Tomo, this *kamizake* really neutralizes the scent of my mouth," said Mitotsudaira. "If possible, I'd like to drink some when we have yakiniku."

"That's right, Asama-chi! Let's sell it! People sometimes try to order some in secret, you know!?"

That sounded incredible, but Suzu suspected it was not actually a good thing.

Besides, this topic always had the same conclusion.

Asama waved her hands back and forth.

"It's for friends. Only for friends. I haven't even given any to my dad since elementary school. It's for girls only."

"Oh? I've wondered before: what does your father think of all this?"

"He has my mom's sake seeds, so he's fine."

"Ohh..." said Suzu and all the other impressed girls.

...Asama-san's dad...must have really gotten along...with her mom...

Suzu had heard a bit about Asama's mom from her own parents. She had married into the Asama Shrine that supported Musashi, so of course she had gathered attention.

Her memories of Asama's mom began with the woman who had given them snacks when they visited Asama at the shrine.

She had been a pretty person.

Suzu recalled the shockingly pretty presence she had sensed when meeting her and she had tensed up when the woman had touched her. It had naturally been him who had spoken upon noticing her unease.

"Oh, if you're going to touch Bell-san, you need to make a noise like this to give her some warning."

The woman had laughed lightly.

...And she said, "Like this, then?"

When she had taken her hand, Suzu had sensed something strange.

She had felt cleaner.

Since her parents ran a bathhouse, she was confident in how clean she kept herself. That had been around the time she had realized the daughter of bathhouse owners could not look worn-out and filthy.

But this had been different.

It had been a permeating purification that moved beyond the surface.

Something like a wave had passed from her hand to her back.

...Yes.

And the woman had said, "Someone takes very good care of you, don't they?"

Suzu had found that embarrassing.

She had understood what it was that had left her body.

The people who lived at the shrine were said to purify impurities.

She had thought she was keeping clean, but she had been wrong. There had been something deeper inside.

So when she had gotten home, she had asked her parents something.

"If I want to...purify the inside...of my body too...what do I need...to do?"

That was how she had started helping out at the bathhouse her parents ran.

It had always made her happy when she visited the Asama Shrine and Asama's mom had complimented her. It had also made her happy when she realized the woman was surprisingly careless and would laugh like normal.

It had made her sad when she had died.

...But Asama-san...is still here...

She was the same.

When Suzu took a drink of the sake she had been given, she could sense it.

The impurities within her were purified starting from her mouth and left her through her back and feet.

She could not drink it all at once.

She could only take one small sip at a time.

It made her soul tremble.

...Kimi-chan is...incredible...

It was amazing that the girl could drink it in such an exaggerated fashion. That likely meant she had no impurities within her.

Asama also drank it like normal, although that might not mean as much when she was the one who had made it. She would occasionally lose control of herself, but Shinto generally accepted male-female relationships and encouraged baby-making.

"...Nn."

Suzu thought to herself while taking another sip.

...Asama-san is...so pretty.

She was approaching the same prettiness her mom had had.

Suzu suspected she would one day surpass even that.

...I need to...do my best too.

Suzu was the same age.

She felt a desire to grow in some way like Asama had. So...

"..."

Suzu took a large gulp of the sake to test herself.

...Wow.

This was apparently not how she was meant to grow.

People were not meant to push themselves too hard.

She trembled and felt like the core of her body was leaving her from throat to hips.

She felt a little woozy.

Adele approached from the side and supported her from behind with an arm.

"Whoa, Suzu-san! ...Oh?"

"Eh? A-Adele...?"

"Well, um..."

While supporting her, Adele moved her arm up and down Suzu's body a bit.
And...

"Oh, uh, well, I guess we'll have a clear answer during next year's class trip."

"A-about what?"

Adele paused for a second, but then she smiled.

"Not to worry! I'll do my best too!"

Was she referring to the mobile shell repairs she was obsessed with lately?

If so, Suzu needed to support her. So...

"R-right. Good...luck."

...Umm, mobile shells are...a type of armor...right?

But the latest trend was lightweight, high-speed models, so she had heard the

armor was very thin and flat.

So she knew what she had to say:

"Flat and...hard is...best, isn't it?"

"...Eh!?"

For some reason, both Adele and Mitotsudaira spoke up.

Mitotsudaira turned toward Asama.

"Is it!?"

"H-how would I know!? ...Masa!"

"Are you sure you're all talking about the same thing?"

Suzu thought it was cool how simply Naomasa excluded herself from these discussions. Meanwhile, Kimi crossed her arms and raised her empty cup toward Asama.

"Another. ...And you were saying you hadn't let your dad drink this since elementary school, right? Was that on your mom's orders?"

"Hmm, I guess you could say that. She said I should stop since I would be a grownup soon."

"A grownup...!"

Adele held her hands in front of her chest and pantomimed some curves, so that may have been what that was about.

But Masazumi asked a question while taking a drink from her cup.

"You said you aren't going to sell it, but what would happen if someone tried to?"

Asama thought about that.

"Good question..."

The security settings were mostly unchanged from when her mother was in charge. So...

"If someone without my authorization tries to drink it, the sake will teleport such that it flows up their urethra, a rule violation alarm will sound across the entirety of Musashi, a Sakuya Surefire Red-Hot Rod will be shoved up their butt, and the sake will turn to no more than water."

"...Wouldn't that last part be enough?"

Masazumi had a point. But...

"That was constructed from generation to generation, so it's added up. Removing them would mean getting our ancestral spirits involved and they see it as 'protecting their descendants'... Oh, but my mom and I didn't add anything."

"...Asama-chi. Could we use that for assassinations? It would work great!"

Lately, Heidi seemed to be becoming something other than a merchant.

But anyway...

"You can take it home with you if you want. But be careful because it would be something of a disaster if someone else tried to drink it. Using it while cooking would be the most dangerous thing."

"What if you're cooking just for yourself?" asked Naomasa.

"Then it should be fine. And the black algae creatures break down filth instead of drinking it, so they shouldn't be affected if any washes down the drain. Any rats that drink it won't be so lucky, though."

"This is pretty much a chemical weapon, isn't it?" said Naomasa.

"Then you can just drink it here like you always have."

"That's right." Naruze took a sip. "We have a party and some sake. So if the drinking is mandatory, you know what comes next, don't you?"

Someone spoke up in response to that.

It was Kimi and she stood up.

"Can someone sing a song? I'll dance to it."

She whirled around and designated a singer.

"Mitotsudaira. ...C'mon."

"Eh? M-me!?"

Mitotsudaira was of course surprised, but Asama also found this to be unexpected.

"Mito, you've already finished a song?"

"The conditions were the same as with you, Tomo. I wrote the lyrics and then Kimi gave it a rough melody."

That response came with a sidelong glance that placed pressure on Asama as well. She was supposed to write two songs. She had already given some of it to Kimi, but...

...Oh, right. There's only 3 days left, isn't there?

She could not say that Mitotsudaira had finished her song quickly. It was Asama herself who was slow.

The astonishment arrived after a short delay and she began sweating in her heart. And then...

"Heh heh."

Here it comes, she thought. Kimi had gotten a refill for her sake cup and she now placed her elbows on Asama's shoulders. She then wrapped her arms around Asama and narrowed her eyes.

"Oh, noooo."

Asama glared back as Kimi laughed smugly.

...Honestly...

"What do you mean 'oh, no'?"

"You don't know?" Kimi lowered her eyebrows in a smile and then sucked in a breath. "Silly girl! Listen! Why do you think I had fun making you say dirty words while you two were studying for the exams!?"

"Don't ask me."

"Heh heh. Because I was spending night after night preparing for the Gagaku Festival and writing your songs instead of studying! Surprised!?"

"Very." Asama's expression remained flat. "Yes...surprised that anyone would be dumb enough to goof off during our study sleepovers when we can't participate in the Gagaku Festival if our exam papers are covered in red marks."

"Eh!? What? You're going to attack me over that!?"

"I would rather not, but yes."

"In other words, you just can't keep your hands off of me, can you!?"

Why would it mean that? she wondered, but since Naruze passed her chopsticks to her left hand and raised her pen in her right, that must have been how it sounded. Meanwhile, the idiot spoke loud enough for her voice to reverberate through the shrine grounds.

"N-no! Asama is going to attack me inside this Shinto stealth field! Now say it! Say, 'Look, it's all red because of all the fun we had night after night... I would really rather not, but today I need to lecture you and Toori-kun.' "

"Toori-kun has nothing to do with this."

"Eh? But after you and Mitotsudaira would go to sleep, I would chat with him via divine transmission while I worked on the songs and he worked on his porn games. He completed a loup-garou knight one while I made Mitotsudaira's song."

"What have you been doing!?"

Asama completely understood the knight's protest, but...

"Don't tell me he was completing a shrine maiden one while you worked on my song."

"Oh, what are you talking about, silly girl? While completing one? Of course not."

"Are you sure?"

"Judge. ...I mostly finished it while the game was installing. My foolish brother said it took so long because it had a lot of images."

"Th-that's even worse! Couldn't you have at least done it while he was playing it!?"

"Tomo! Tomo! You're losing sight of your own argument here!"

Mitotsudaira was right.

But that idiot aside, the exams had been their greatest concern and they were complete. Warning Kimi about her idiocy here would accomplish nothing.

...Fine, then.

"Yes. ...The exams are complete, so let's refocus ourselves."

"Heh heh. That's right! Now that the exams are complete, we need to refocus ourselves! Right!?"

Why did her own idea sound so infuriating when that idiot spread her arms and restated it? However...

"Otherwise you can never erase the fact that you drew the Sailboat! Right!?"

Asama's face went entirely pale and she looked up.

She had questions like "when did she see that?" and "she's bluffing, right!?", but...

"Heh heh heh. Acrobatic~"

The idiot sister bent over and did a handstand.

She apparently did not intend to respond no matter what Asama said. Asama tried to hide her blushing face, but then she felt sweat on her neck and back.

...I-it's kind of dark out, so hopefully no one will notice!

And then...

"Asama...-san...?"

Suzu spoke to her.

She had likely detected the blush based on its heat.

"Are you...okay?"

...Oh, no!

Suzu's considerate nature would be a threat here.

"I-I'm perfectly fine. Just a little drunk is all. Y-yes!"

"Isn't it highly unusual for you to get drunk?"

That may have been true, but it would be dangerous to admit to it.

So she ignored the eyes on her, and...

"Umm, how much of your song have you finished, Mito?"

She was less curious than she was in desperate need of a new topic. Also...

"We'd like to hear it too," said Naito.

"That's right," agreed Naruze.

That was important since Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Kimi had already heard their new song.

But Mitotsudaira sighed and shrugged.

"To be honest, there's one part I haven't figured out yet."

"Eh? ...But you've sent the lyrics to Kimi to write the music, haven't you?"

Kimi was the one to answer that.

She nodded first.

"You mean what you're going to say during the intro and interlude, right?"

"...Say?"

"Judge," replied Kimi. "Knight songs always have an 'introductory statement' or MC portion in addition to the lyrics, don't they?"

"Now that you mention it..."

The knight songs that Mitotsudaira sang at karaoke had a few unique features.

Due to the time period they came from, they all demanded a male vocal range, they included a roar of praise for their king or nation, and...

...They have a story.

Before the song began, they would state what kind of story the song would

tell. And in the middle, the developing contents of the lyrics would be explained.

"It's a lot like a stage play," said Mitotsudaira. "With just the music and lyrics, you could be singing about any battle or triumphant return. It is the statements in the beginning and middle that reveal the background to the song."

"Why are the lyrics made to be so generic?" asked Naomasa.

"There is a simple reason for that: kings change and orders of knight are disbanded or reestablished due to fluctuating numbers. If those things were specified in the lyrics themselves, you would have to remake the entire song. Also..."

Also...

"This is not limited to knight songs. The bards who spread gossip and folksongs do not create new songs about each new area they travel to. ...They take a generic song and add the appropriate 'story' portion for that nation or region. It's all part of a performance to make it sound like a cohesive whole. ...It's not quite a tradition, but old songs tend to work that way. That is why the story portion is important when writing a song in that style."

"And you haven't come up with yours yet?"

"Judge. I know what I want to sing and convey, but I haven't decided how exactly I will do that. Without the story, it is my own knight song. With it, it is a story that includes me. I am not good at improvising."

"Heh heh. If you could improvise, you could add an adlibbed story to a romantic tune in the medieval bard's special attack; the Love Song."

"Again with this!?" said Mitotsudaira while baring her fangs toward Kimi.

But Asama understood why Mitotsudaira could not sing here.

"You want to include that story part when you first publicly perform the song, don't you?"

Mitotsudaira heard Naomasa say "I see" and everyone else voiced their own understanding.

She had been asked to sing a song to help liven up the party.

But if they understood why she could not do that...

...It means they're expecting something from me and don't think I'm going to half-ass this.

The Cerberus on her head gave three simultaneous cries in response to everyone's understanding. The Cerberus must have picked up on her feelings and seemed to be telling her to calm down. Everyone smiled a bit at that.

But she also saw Uzy twirling around above Kimi's head. The Mouse held an acoustic spell sign frame. It was a spell circle bearing the word "microphone".

Kimi grabbed the sign frame and stuck it in her cleavage.

"Now, Mitotsudaira, put it in your mouth!"

"What are you talking about!?"

The idiot sister responded to her shout by kissing and licking it. Then she looked back at Mitotsudaira.

"It was actually a strawberry milk flavored *chitose-ame*...! Well!? Surprised!?"

"...Um, I honestly have no idea what you're talking about."

"Silly girl! I was doing the bit where the servant warms her master's cough drop with her body heat so it will melt more quickly! Asama! Since Mitotsudaira won't lick it, you come here! Let's press our boobs together to the double cough drop! You really missed out, Mitotsudaira... This has a divine protection on it that makes your boobs grow if you lick it."

Adele stood up fast enough to flip over the table in front of her, but Naomasa grabbed her waist with her prosthetic arm and had her sit back down.

Beyond them, Asama was making an "ignore her" gesture and Mitotsudaira had to agree.

So she took a breath and spoke.

"If something like that does exist, could you just leave it there for me so we can skip the licking part? I can pick it up before I head home."

"Eh!? You actually believed me!?"

Mitotsudaira raised her fist, but the idiot and Uzy escaped with long strides.

However, she left behind the sign frame.

And another dozen or so sign frames appeared behind Mitotsudaira.

This was Turning Point, the spell that Kimi used, and it was already in standby mode.

“...Who is going to use this?”

“Eh?”

Kimi sounded confused.

She swayed back and forth as she walked back over Mitotsudaira’s way.

“Me, of course. We need a song and dance here and my plan fell through, so it’s my responsibility to provide a replacement.”

“You’ve already completed your song for the Gagaku Festival?”

“Of course I have.” Kimi agreed as readily as breathing and gave a smiling wink. “So I’ll be performing a new song here. It’s titled Dance of Joyful Awakening.”

Chapter 4: Dancers Waiting for Night

第四章

『夜待ち場の踊り子達』



待機状態なのか
準備状態なのか
配点（本番待ち）

Are we waiting?

Or are we preparing?

Point Allocation (Before the Performance)

Naito heard the beginning of the sound.

Turning Point produced the tuning sound that played before the intro to Kimi's new song.

Tuning was important.

Especially given the location.

...Places like this can be difficult.

Shrines seemed like an open space, but they were not really.

It seemed like the sound would disperse through the sky and air to produce a dead sound void of reverberation, but the shrine building and gravel ground would reflect the sound back.

By playing low notes and high notes while adjusting the volume, you would come to understand which sounds were alive and which were dead so you could reshape things into the optimum form.

Kimi's Turning Point was raising the volume of all the different sounds to match the special space of the Asama Shrine.

It was a thorough tuning that seemed to weave the sounds together.

Only Kimi would be able to do this since she offered songs at the Asama Shrine. She probably had a library of patterns set up from her past performances, but...

"Is it a bit tricky with a new song?"

Naito asked Kimi that and the dancer smiled thinly.

"Do you want a stage version?"

...Wow.

Naito had been trying to work her way up to asking that, but Kimi caught on

immediately.

Naito did indeed want the tuning library for a theatre ship's stage.

What were the acoustics like on a theatre ship's stage? How did the sounds die there?

They had originally been planning to rehearse on the ship. They would have recorded the data from that performance and created a tuning pattern that matched their instruments.

That had been the plan.

But thanks to the mysterious phenomena, they had only been able to rehearse on Shinagawa's cargo plaza.

So they would have to get the theatre ship tuning right the first time.

The third years could probably manage that. All of those bands had performed in the previous year's Gagaku Festival. They could tune based on the previous year's library.

However, Naito and Naruze were different. They did not have data from the previous year.

...But...

Naito thought, *There is a way for us to obtain a tuning library for a theatre ship.*

And that was...

"Kimi."

Naruze spoke before Naito was finished thinking.

Her eyebrows were somewhat raised as she opened her mouth.

"You activated Turning Point when we defeated the Non-God Sword on the Tanigawa Castle, didn't you? ...Could we have the tuning data from that?"

Her tone was sharp and Kimi immediately responded to the question.

She turned her palms upwards and held out her hands.

And with a full-face smile...

“Giiiive me something!!”

She was so direct it was impossible to dodge. It seemed a Technohexen’s willpower was useless against a crazy person. That seemed like an important lesson, but she was also fairly certain she had learned this lesson several times before.

But Naito said what she had to say.

“An ‘object’ wouldn’t work, would it?”

“Oh? Then will you show me something?”

She knew what Kimi was saying.

Yes. That girl was a performer. But...

“Huh?” asked Adele. “But Kimi-san is a performer...so wouldn’t it make perfect sense for her to give you tuning data in exchange for some kind of ‘object’?”

Someone had an answer to that: Asama.

She smiled toward Adele and raised her right index finger.

“You see, Adele, Kimi’s tuning data is not a performance.”

Asama had gotten started.

“Listen,” she began. “You can provide an offering in exchange for a performer’s performance, but the tuning data that Naito and Naruze are trying to get from Kimi is not a performance. They need to show her-...”

“Their boobs!!!”

“...You can just ignore her. Yes, you don’t need to feel down, Adele. You don’t need boobs to get Kimi’s support. Um...what was I saying again?”

Asama’s response was impressive in its own way. But they were getting nowhere fast, so Naito said it herself.

“As a performer, Kimi-chan will give us the tuning information if we show her some kind of performance.”

“Judge. That’s right. ...But I know you two can do something that would

entertain me, so do your best.”

“Eh?”

Naruze gave Naito a puzzled look, as if to ask if they had anything like that.

Naito did not know the answer either, but if they had Kimi’s guarantee, then they had to have some kind of good performance.

...What is it?

Kimi was telling them to do their best, but her tone made it clear it would not be that hard to find. They simply had not noticed it. But...

“Then let’s get started.”

Kimi had finished her tuning and the actual music started.

This began her new song titled Dance of Joyful Awakening.

Kimi raised both her hands in front of her and opened her throat.

“—————”

She began.

Mitotsudaira straightened up when she heard Kimi’s voice.

...This...

“Now, it is time to rise and shine. Your long slumber is coming to an end.

“Good morning, foolish masses. Good morning, Musashi.”

She was speaking.

These were not lyrics carrying a melody.

Just like a knight’s song, she was establishing the story with a talking portion. Then the actual lyrics began.

“I remember my dozing dream.

“In the dim light of my closed eyes.”

They were short sentences, but they came quick with only short breaths between them.

"I remember the light.

"In the brief time we were together."

It was a dance song.

Not a knight's song.

It began with talking and created a story, but it was not the song of a knight or a bard.

...How is she so good at this!?

Kimi had taken the structure of older songs and used it for a modern dance song.

She added the speaking portion to something other than a knight's song to give it more of a story.

She seemed to be saying that the story format was not just for knights.

...And what is this she's singing about?

The music could only be called bright and shining, but the words...

"I remember that parting.

"That sudden farewell."

It was of course not a knight's song.

The lyrics Mitotsudaira heard sang of a parting in the past.

But it was not a dark thing. The opening had established this as a song of awakening. The music was like a bright light and it was not looking back at the past; it was remembering the past while moving forward.

It was a song of the present. And to prove it...

"I remember what came after that.

"All the time we have spent together."

"Kh," groaned Mitotsudaira as she clenched her teeth.

She also heard voices of "ah" or "oh" from those around her.

...Judge. You understand the story Kimi is telling, don't you?

It was about *him*.

No, it was technically about *her life with him* from the past to now. So...

"I hate the dark, so I wake up.

"I pull the blanket close and open one eye.

"I want to go somewhere bright.

"So I call and call and you hold my hand..."

Kimi sang of herself sleeping in a dimly-lit bed.

She wanted to go somewhere bright and called for him, so he took her hand.

"You open the window and bathe in the sun.

"A ring of light surrounds your hair.

"There is a smile on your face.

"There must be one on mine too."

Mitotsudaira understood. She wanted to go somewhere bright, but she could not move once he took her hand. So he opened the window to brighten the place where they already were.

And those siblings would probably smile for no real reason while lying half-asleep on the bed.

Then another talking portion arrived to comment on that fact.

"Ha ha. This is such a luxury.

"Happiness fills everything for just this moment."

The talking confirmed what Mitotsudaira had been imagining and showed her even more.

Of course, what Kimi said did not explicitly state what the story was.

But anyone who knew those two would imagine the same thing from it. Kimi showed them that by adding a question.

"...Don't you think?"

It supported Mitotsudaira's imagination even further.

That guidance was nearly a bluff, but it worked on those girls who really had been imagining it. But...

“I am thinking of the horizon.

“I always hold such high hopes.”

...*Eh?*

That lyric made Mitotsudaira think of something else. And...

“I am thinking and appreciating.

“My friends and you.”

...*Ah.*

It happened again. There was no mistaking it now.

Those were puns.

Or a play on words. She had used one word to sound like another. And in this case...

...*She made it sound like our names.*

Friends sounded like Tomo, appreciate like Mito, and high hopes like the summit. And simplest of all...

...*Horizon.*

What had she been appreciating and hoping for from those words in relation to him?

But Kimi did not sing any more on that subject.

“When I look across the classroom,

“I see a nice and lively atmosphere.

“But I pat you on the back,

“To take that bright, bright time in my hand...”

At that point, Kimi clapped her hands once.

She began to dance.

She had only been doing some light swaying and stepping up to that point,

but now she twirled around, showed her back, and opened her mouth to speak.

“Heh heh. I am always serious.

“This is fun, but let’s reach even greater heights, okay?”

The story continued. It had shifted from the morning awakening to everyday life. Those two still had their bright time together, but it was now shared with everyone else.

“Now, follow me, you lacking girls. C’mooooon!”

She swung up both arms and Turning Point burst.

An incredible amount of light rained down and illuminated the entirety of the shrine grounds. Below that, Mitotsudaira saw the dancer holding white cloths in her hands so they streamed behind her as she bathed in the light and danced with a smile on her face.

“I think of the future.

“You place your arm around my shoulders afterschool.”

This was not about their date the other day. It would be about a date with him some other day. After all, the previous talking portion had established this as an ode to everyday life with him.

...Honestly.

Mitotsudaira lightly swayed in time with the dance’s rhythm.

...Does she have to show off so much when I’m having trouble coming up with my own story portion?

She had the lyrics that Kimi had written music for, but now she was thinking about discussing it with Kimi and rewriting them.

This went beyond the story. The wolf wanted to create a knight’s song that broke free of her old shell and looked to the future.

Asama saw Mitotsudaira’s shoulders droop as if she had come to accept something.

She likely had a variety of thoughts, but she had come to an understanding or resigned herself to something as she listened to Kimi's song.

"I think of walking alongside you,

"As our laughter blends together.

"I think of dinner,

"And laundry and cleaning."

That was a very Kimi-like lyric structure. She added in a series of words to confirm their meaning and show the change between them.

That had a way of leaving the core of her meaning inside your mind. That friend looked wild, but...

"I think of our everyday,

"As we hold hands and fall asleep."

...Uuh.

You don't hold his hand as you fall asleep every day, do you? Do you!?

Mitotsudaira was glaring at Kimi and clenching her fist, so Kimi's guidance here was perfect.

"I wake up and see the moon in the window.

"When I call out, your voice answers me.

"There is a smile on your face.

"There must be one on mine too..."

That's right, thought Asama to agree with Kimi's words. Those siblings were always looking to the same thing, as if they were sharing their enjoyment and sorrow. And then the final lyrics rang out.

"You follow your dream.

"I smile and accept that.

"Let's go together to the horizon and beyond.

"Let's continue on forever and ever and ever..."

Nothing was as crass as asking if the play on words was intentional. That was something they shared in secret. Even if the story was stated and confirmed, the most important parts were left unsaid as a shared secret.

That dance song inspired joy and was inspired by joy.

Thus it was the Dance of Joyful Awakening. It was very much Kimi's song.

As the last note finally faded, Kimi shook her hair and smiled.

The song was over.

Naomasa stated her own impression while seeing Adele applaud emotionally and Suzu applaud joyfully.

"They say going to a lot of trouble for a guy makes a woman beautiful." She smiled bitterly and added something else for Kimi who was wiping away the sweat with a towel. "But going to a lot of trouble for family is just in a woman's nature."

"Is that what you have to say to 'us'?"

Someone asked that while standing up.

It was Naruze.

She pointed at Naomasa with her pen and asked something else.

"I can ask how the plan to reinforce our brooms is going, right?" The Technohexen sighed and glared at Kimi. "After showing us that, it's obvious we have to make quite a performance to pay for that data. ...I don't mean for this to count as that, but we do have something neat to show you. Okay, Naomasa. Can you bring those out now?"

"Don't ask how it's going and then immediately demand the result."

"I got the order right. I just sped things up between those steps," said Naruze. "So how about it? Are our brooms ready?"

"...Of course they are."

Naito saw Naomasa take a sip of sake.

Then she looked to Naruze who was already scooting over toward Naomasa. As a winged species, she had to make sure her wings did not knock over the food and bento boxes as she did so.

She kept her wings pointed out from the center of the mats as she circled around to Naomasa's side.

Naomasa glanced up at the others, and...

"What? Are you all that curious about it?"

The slight flush to her cheeks probably was not due to the sake. Everyone was focused on her because of the Technohexen's brooms.

...We did try to keep it a secret that we had her modifying them.

But from the way it all worked out, everyone probably knew. They had not demanded it be kept secret, so while the information would not have left Class Plum, it would have been shared with the class.

In that case, there was no point in hiding it.

"So what are they like?"

"Look."

Naomasa opened two small sign frames and tossed them to Naito and Naruze.

When they caught them on their palms, Naomasa explained in her usual disinterested tone.

"I've put them in the engine division's shared phase space locker. I used my own privileges, but it's apparently pretty expensive, so remove them and take them with you ASAP."

"Could you explain what you did before we thank you?"

"It'll only be a general explanation."

Naomasa scratched her head.

And she opened two more sign frames. Naito initially thought they were

widescreen, but they were even longer than that.

They displayed images of the brooms at half of life size.

Naomasa first held up Naito's broom.

"With Naito's, the front end tends to wobble at high speeds, so..."

"You held it in place?"

"No, I surrounded the brush on the tail so it would provide straighter speed. ... That probably increased the top speed, but the front end issue is probably meaningless now. I wanted to transfer turning to the front grip, but I didn't have time. I instead designed the stabilizing wings to double as a grip like you said, so when turning, grab the front and do it with your ass. You're used to that, right?"

"Oh, yes, yes. Understood."

Wow, I'm trying to act tough, thought Naito, but that was just who she was.

If they had achieved stability by adding weight to the front, the broom would have needed a lot more power. That would be fine if she just wanted a stable flight at mid-level speeds, but...

...That's not what this is about.

She was not riding the broom for transportation.

She was riding it to fly.

And she was able to read most of the modified points with a glance at the sign frame. Then she looked at Naruze's next to it.

"For Ga-chan's, you focused on acceleration and tight turning, didn't you? It's more about initial speed than top speed."

"My guidelines are more important the closer they are to the enemy, so I would appreciate enough acceleration and tight turning to zip all around them."

"Even if Naito's emphasizes top speed, the high speed range was pretty much the same as with Naruze's, so I made them the same there. When you enter that max speed range, you activate the...after reflex was it?"

"Yes, but that wears down the brush. But as long as I don't use that, Ga-chan

and I are the same speed."

"Had you not noticed that?"

Once Naomasa mentioned it, she realized that was true.

Flying on a broom was an analog technique. The spells had originally only been there to make the broom fly, so the settings spells for the restriction and release of power or speed had come later.

According to Naruze next to her...

"I always thought Margot was working to match my speed. Because I tend to fly out ahead. ...Looks like I was mistaken."

"Oh, um, I do work to match your speed. I intermittently use the after reflex acceleration to raise my speed. Without that, I can't keep up with your initial speed."

"Eh? Is that what you're doing?"

When Naito nodded, Naruze's shoulders drooped.

"I just thought you had a really good broom."

"That's just how it works. Schwarz Techno acceleration spells are pretty rough. The broom itself is using reduction repulsion to fly, so it starts out slow and has trouble building up speed. But if you add on an acceleration spell, the broom tends to hop up below you."

Hearing that, Naruze narrowed her eyes and looked up. She wrinkled her brow and finally responded.

"I remember you mentioning that a long time ago..."

Naito also remembered saying it, but she chose to respond differently now.

"Did I?"

"Yes, you did." Naruze smiled with her eyebrows slightly raised. "When I offered to slow down because I always fly out ahead, you said that was fine because it let you see my butt."

Crap. That I don't remember. But it's true, so I guess it doesn't matter. And I'll sometimes intentionally slow down to get a good look from behind, so I guess it

really doesn't matter.

She also saw Asama spit out her sake, so she just accepted it.

...As long as it made someone laugh.

She had a feeling that was not laughter, but oh well. Meanwhile, Naomasa poked at the sign frames with a finger.

"I did modify them like you told me to, but I'm honestly not used to working on Technohexen devices."

"So even you had trouble with the combination of machine and spells, huh?"

"I didn't say I had trouble with it. I said I'm *not used to it*."

She corrected Naito.

Naito thought about this correction from Naomasa.

...So many people in our class just refuse to admit defeat.

But Adele tilted her head.

"What do you mean by a combination of machine and spells?"

"Ohh... This can be a pain to explain, so I'll just run through it real quick. For example, you know it takes a lot of reinforcement spells and whatnot for a broom to fly, right?"

"In other words," said Naruze to continue for her. "The broom normally has spells built into it so it's best flown in its base state."

"Oh, I get it."

Adele seemed to have caught on. That would be thanks to the repair work she was doing on her mobile shell. Asama also nodded, but Kimi was more suspect. Naito had a feeling she was just going along with the others' reaction.

Mitotsudaira, however, tilted her head.

"What does that mean?"

"Judge. Ga-chan and I are experts at using spells to modify the broom's *base state*."

And...

"Masa-yan is an expert at attaching machines to modify the broom's base state."

But...

"Ga-chan and I don't really understand machines that well. And Masa-yan, um..."

"I'm not used to spells."

"Right, right. That's what I was going for," said Naito. "So doing both is really difficult."

"Is that so? ...But for both the spells and the machines, you can take readings and adjust them accordingly, can't you?"

"Flying through the sky is pretty unstable, Mitotsudaira. The directional control balance still does things we don't expect and can change entirely depending on the weather conditions or air currents. ...We aren't following a flat and straight path. It's more accurate to say we're flying forward with a technique that could send us rocketing any which way at any moment." Naruze held up the sign frame displaying her feather broom. "We are taking readings. Naomasa is helping us with that and should have included the optimum parts for our needs. But whether they give us what we want is up to the adjustments we'll be making from now on."

"I want to make sure it's balanced well from front to back."

If they could do that, they could at least fly straight and make ascents and descents.

Mitotsudaira then nodded.

"That sounds like a lot of work."

"No, no. We can't really call it that. Or rather, it just comes with the territory. ...But there is one place that has managed to mix the two aspects really well."

"Where is that?"

Naito saw the wolf's eyebrows rise slightly.

The knight had likely realized the reason why their enemy was so formidable.

So Naito gave the answer. She spoke the name of what they hoped would be their next destination.

"Edel Brocken."

Heidi stopped drinking her sake when she heard Naito's answer.

Until now, she had been focused on the same thing she always did at times like this: figuring out a way to safely sell Asama's sake. But...

...*Hmm...*

She was interested in this topic because of how it could benefit *her*. She was of course familiar with the Edel Brocken brand and with Wild Kamelie, their tester in Musashi.

Wild Kamelie was ranked first in the delivery business. She used her high-speed deliveries to work as a messenger. And she limited her deliveries to letters and documents, refusing to carry anything else.

At first glance, that sounded like a simple job.

But she had an excellent reputation and charged high prices.

Those high prices were paid for both her speed and safety.

Of course, Wild Kamelie was not flying at safe speeds.

But if you hired her, your delivery was guaranteed to safely reach its recipient.

...Corporate conflicts and espionage by other nations does happen on the Musashi.

So there occasionally were "accidents".

But Wild Kamelie would slip past all of that.

She had more than just social status.

She was the pride and face of Musashi's delivery business.

So what if Naito and Naruze took her top ranking?

"————"

God, what a pain, was Heidi's honest thought on that. A change in the delivery business's internal ranking would not affect the corporations, nations, and other clients' trust in Wild Kamelie.

But it would be devastating for anything that relied on her strength.

So any clients who build up their brand name by having her use their products would instead rely on the new Rank 1.

...Which means...

How many of those clients does Wild Kamelie have? wondered Heidi as she began a search.

"Hiii!"

Naruze glared at Heidi when the girl raised her hand.

She had probably thought up some business deal related to the match with Wild Kamelie, so Naruze nodded once and gave her answer.

"Absolutely not."

"P-please reconsider!"

"You understand each other?" asked Naomasa as Naruze continued.

"You're asking for some influence over our delivery rights once we take Rank 1, aren't you?"

"Of course! We'll handle all of your advertisements! Your names will be known far and wide!"

"No, thanks. You would only hurt our reputation."

"Huh? Now wait just a minute." Heidi tilted her head. "Have we ever done anything that would hurt someone's reputation? I'll sue you for defamation!"

"How about what you're doing right now!?"

When everyone else shouted back at her, the merchant immediately pretended to cry.

"I-I can't believe you all... B-business is poor right now, you know?"

She was incredibly easy to read.

Naruze sighed and spoke to the merchant.

"You received a bunch of money to let the Konishi Company stay at the port, didn't you?"

"Eh!? Did I say that? Are you sure you aren't misremembering!?"

"Suzu."

Suzu nodded.

"Yes. You said that."

Heidi collapsed backwards.

"Goddammit!"

She really was easy to read, but surely she was not like this during business dealings.

In any case, the sulking merchant rolled onto her side, opened a sign frame, and began a divine transmission.

"Fine then. I'll just find a way to make some money from Wild Kamelie's clients when she makes a mistake."

"Relying on someone else's mistakes is not a winning business strategy."

"A true merchant turns it into a winning strategy."

There was no longer any negativity in her voice. She had likely found something of interest and begun to act on it.

"Nothing keeps you down, does it?"

When Naruze said that, Margot turned toward her and away from the sign frame of her modified broom. Her eyebrows were somewhat raised for once and she spoke in a mildly scolding tone.

"Y'know, Ga-chan. Nothing keeps you down either."

"Really?"

"Yes. You might start feeling down, but you bounce back higher than you began. And you take everything so seriously that it can get dangerous."

Naruze could not think of any examples of that happening, but she did understand one part of it.

"I'll agree I take things seriously."

Everyone glared at her, but she chose not to worry about it.

"Just so you know, I do take things seriously. In a doujinshi, I make sure the combination begins within 3 pages, I always include a proper ending, and I never forget to write an afterword."

"Ga-chan, you really don't let anything keep you down, do you!?"

She chose to view that as a compliment.

But they had yet to really prove themselves.

The two of them had looked through most everything on the sign frames in front of them.

"Margot, what do you think?"

"Hmm, it's honestly hard to tell without actually riding it."

"Yeah, you are the type to not read the manual."

Naruze could hardly believe someone like that could pull off that Schwarz Hexen flight that essentially used explosions of acceleration, but according to Margot...

"If you can't adlib, I doubt you could ride something like this very well."

That may have been why she was such a good match with Naruze, who was the exact opposite.

"In that case," said Naruze while picking up the opening spell sign frame Naomasa had given her. "After checking the manual real quick, let's bring them out."

A chilly wind blew down from an elevated area.

The wind blowing down the tall wooden staircase would gather at the bottom of those academy stairs.

Night had begun on the Musashi and a few people were gathered at the bottom of those stairs.

One of them wore a black uniform with both the top and bottom shortened.

"Okay, 1st Special Duty Unit, gather here for the meeting of night guards."

The black-haired girl wore an armband that said "1st Special Duty Officer — Watanabe Yoritsuna" and the boys and girls seated in front of her straightened up and turned her way.

Everyone but Watanabe was down on their knees but with their toes pressed against the ground.

They were seated but prepared to move at any moment.

Watanabe nodded at them all.

"Okay, did anything weird happen on your way here?"

"Judge."

"Yes, Tenzou-kun. What was it? Did Crossunite-sensei do something again?"

"No, um, when I left the house, my idi-...Crossunite-sensei was collapsed on the floor with a smile on his face, his eyes rolled back in his head, and a paper that said 'How to Make Legal Herbs' in his hand. But that happens so often I would not call it weird."

Watanabe nodded.

"Did you call the guards?"

"No, because they've started telling me, 'Again? Please work this out within your family from now on'..."

"Hm. You still need to call them. Enough calls and you can still get him thrown in a cell."

"I see," said Tenzou with a hand on his head.

Watanabe then tilted her head.

"So what happened?"

"Judge. Just between those of us here, I saw Vice Chancellor Oosuga and Ohiroshiki from my class being taken to a guard station together."

"Yeah, they apparently got into a serious fistfight inside a food stand. The report came to us too."

"So that's what happened. ...Is it true the Chancellor was with them too?"

"Um, yes. She was caught red-handed trying to swap out her skirt with the contents of the register while the other two fought. She apparently insists that she was 'bartering'."

Everyone hung their head in silence and Watanabe continued.

"The Student Council is pretty normal, but I'm the only normal one in the Chancellor's Officers, so keep that in mind when dealing with them."

She then raised her right forearm and opened her smiling mouth.

"...Waterfall."

When she said that, sign frames opened in front of everyone. They were small, only as large as the space between their eyes, and they did not emit light.

They were used to display private or secret information and opened when a password was spoken.

Tenzou viewed the sign frame which was drawn with transparent thin ink.

The image was drawn with a gradient of thin ink, but each shade of gray was assigned a color on a virtual chart. Anyone on the 1st Special Duty Unit needed to see the image in full color the instant they saw the transparent thin ink image. However...

...Get too used to this, and doujinshis printed in thin ink become a lot harder to read.

The artist was not familiar with their shades-to-colors chart, so once he was accustomed to viewing things like that, his mental image would see the skin as green, dark red, or striped blue and yellow.

He still remembered the fear he felt when various body parts or the "man beam" had looked pink or blue.

It can be so hard to deal with.

...But full color doujinshis is too much to ask for, so I tend to go for the porn games instead.

With that thought, Tenzou settled down and viewed the image. It displayed...

"Wild Kamelie."

Watanabe quietly spoke the individual's name using a ninja technique.

Tenzou was familiar with her.

She was ranked first in the delivery business and she was Edel Brocken's current tester in Musashi. Naito and Naruze had recently moved up to Rank 2, so they would eventually challenge her over that Edel Brocken tester position.

Since those two might challenge her, he had looked up some information on her.

...But I doubt Naruze-dono would want it.

Naito-dono would probably accept the information, though, he added.

But...

"Generally, Technohexen battles are in violation of Musashi's aerial laws and city security laws. She is not a student, so self-defense is the only legitimate reason for her to fight. Even if they are only competing over the delivery business's internal rankings, we cannot overlook this as the Chancellor's Officers in charge of protecting the city."

As Watanabe spoke, the image of Wild Kamelie changed.

She was now wielding a *schale besen*.

...And firing through a transport ship.

He did not know why, but...

"She once sunk an M.H.R.R. corporate transport ship after it 'lost control'. We avoided disaster because one of Konishi-san's large transport ships caught it

down below, but if something like that happens again, it would harm the Chancellor's Officers' reputation."

A third year girl next to Tenzou raised her hand.

She then stood up.

"If we are acting on a legal basis, shouldn't the 2nd Special Duty Unit handle it? We primarily do intelligence work, so trivial fights don't really seem like our business."

"The 2nd Special Duty Unit is in Aki. Negotiations related to the festival are underway there, so they will be on guard duty for the time being."

"Yes," said someone else nearby. "If we are going to perform a largescale mysterious phenomena purification of the Musashi using the theatre ship, then K.P.A. Italia wants to rob us of our forces so that will fail."

"It's a political issue. ...If all goes well, we'll be able to show off Musashi's power without any interference from other nations. And," added Watanabe. "We can also show off our resolve."

...Our resolve?

No one immediately nodded at what Watanabe said.

She provided no explanation for the word resolve, so everyone made their own interpretation and responded after a short pause. They all faced her, and...

"Judge."

"Yes, yes. Don't think about it too much. But there's a good chance Wild Kamelie-san here will be fighting two of our students pretty soon. ...Tenzou-kun."

"Ah, judge."

He stood up.

...I guess it's interrogation time.

In a way, this was where he had to show off his *resolve*.

He had to make up his mind and convey what information he had, no matter who it was about. *Yes, even if they are my friends... Actually, are they even my friends? H-hmm...*

"What is it, Tenzou-kun?"

"Oh, um, I was just realizing how very difficult this is."

"Now, now." Watanabe waved a hand dismissively. And, "We've already seen their combat abilities in the other day's Hidden Dragon battle and during their recent training early in the mornings."

The thin ink image displayed a shot of those two performing aerial combat training with Urquiaga. It was shot from a distance.

...Uqui-dono is surprisingly nimble.

Tenzou was used to seeing the two Technohexen flying, but it was more unusual with Urquiaga. However...

"We can all determine their combat abilities from these images, can't we? So, Tenzou-kun, I'd like for you to give us information other than that."

For example...

"Where do those two often go? What stores or restaurants?"

Asama received a divine mail from Tenzou.

The Asama Shrine's barrier was closed, so any incoming divine transmissions would pass through her first. So she checked who it was sent to.

"Um, Naito and Naruze? ...You have a divine mail from Tenzou-kun."

"Huh?" Naruze frowned. "What's that ninja up to now? Is he aiming for Margot just because he loves busty blondes?"

"Hey, Ga-chan? Let's not suddenly start drawing a doujinshi based on Tenzou."

Naito then turned toward Asama.

"Could you read the message? I don't want this weird atmosphere to hang

over us."

"Oh, yes," said Asama with a nod.

She went on to read the message from Tenzou verbatim.

" 'What stores or restaurants do you two often visit?' "

Tenzou saw an immediate reply.

The message connected him to a local divine chat, so he could see them posting in real time.

Mal-Ga: "Tenzou, I hope you're fine with going uncensored."

Gold Mar: "Wow. Attacking from below!?"

Asama: "Tenzou-kun, there's a difference between courage and recklessness."

10ZO: "Wait! You're...you're taking this in some weird direction!!"

Wise Sister: "Heh heh heh. Then tell us what that was supposed to mean. Ready, set, go!"

Tenzou realized the truth was the only option here.

10ZO: "I am at a 1st Special Duty Unit meeting and we decided we should know where those two are if we want to ensure Musashi's safety!"

Asama was aware she was glaring as she sent the divine transmission to everyone. And...

"You heard him."

"Couldn't Tenzou-san have come up with a better excuse?"

It was wonderful how quickly Adele reached that conclusion.

"Judge," said Mitotsudaira next to her. "Last month, didn't he try to confess to the blonde girl working at a Murayama udon shop, but couldn't work up the courage to say anything, ate 5 bowls of udon, and left? No one asked him about it, but on the way back, he still felt the need to insist he had succeeded by

showing her his love of her udon."

"He is so pathetic..."

"And wasn't it the manager that actually cooked the udon? I saw him once, but he was an incredibly muscular man with tons of chest hair and he was reading a horse racing newspaper."

Asama saw Naruze nod at Adele's comment and then use Asama's divine transmission assistance.

"I'll be making an outside connection."

"Oh, yes. Go right ahead."

"Um, but what does this mean?" asked Mitotsudaira. "Why would Tenzou do this all of a sudden?"

"Heh heh heh. You don't know? The Spring School Festival and Gagaku Festival are coming up! Who doesn't dream of bringing someone there!?"

I see, thought Asama. And when she wondered who she would bring with her...

...Yeah, it would just be Kimi and Mito like always.

At best, he might be dragged along by Kimi and join them.

He loved these lively events, so there was no helping that. But...

"What is Tenzou-kun going to do...?"

Tenzou saw a second-year girl raise her hand. She held a sign frame and walked over to Watanabe.

"Um..."

Watanabe nodded as she whispered in her ear.

The girl returned to her position and Watanabe turned to face Tenzou.

"Tenzou-kun, it seems a freely-distributed adult doujin based on you is being uncensored on-...no, I got that backwards. An uncensored adult doujin based on you is being freely distributed on the divine network. What did you do?"

10ZO: "Wait! What did you do!?"

Asama: "Eh? I-I didn't do anything. I only opened up the divine transmission environment for Naruze."

10ZO: "That's something! Something major! And Naruze-dono! Why do you always make adult doujins of people to harm them!?"

Mal-Ga: "Sob, sob. Margot, that pathetic ninja is cruelly calling me an adult doujin terrorist..."

Gold Mar: "There, there, Ga-chan. But Tenzou can't help it. He isn't used to being drawn in those like Asama-chi is."

Asama: "Huhhh!? I'm not used to that at alll. What are you talking abooooout!?"

The damage had spread, so why didn't it seem to have diluted any?

At any rate, asking those cruel people was a waste of time, so Tenzou raised his hand.

"Uh, I believe their most recent hangouts are the Blue Thunder and the Asama Shrine."

"Hmm. Then we'll have to make sure no ground battles occur there."

When Watanabe said that with her arms crossed, a first year sitting at the edge raised their hand.

"Will there be a ground battle?"

"When the Rank 2 and 3 fought at the Asama Shrine the other day, it was a ground battle. ...Although they fought inside a barrier, so it didn't cause any damage outside," explained Watanabe. "Also, Wild Kamelie was apparently the leader of a Technohexen unit that fought demons in the area from eastern M.H.R.R. to the border of Eastern Europe's Russia. She uses high-speed attacks and gunner spells and she's more of a lone wolf than anything."

Watanabe's words echoed quietly around them.

"She is a Technohexen of an older age."

"Huh?"

Asama heard Naomasa voice her confusion.

"There are old and new Technohexen?"

It was Mitotsudaira who responded.

"I remember my mother telling me that druids and shamans qualify. But..."

She trailed off and faced Naito with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

Asama knew why she would give Naito that doubtful look.

"Wild Kamelie-san has a black broom...so she's a Schwarz Hexen just like Naito, right? Are there old and new versions of that?"

"Well, yes. There are actually many different types of Schwarz Hexen...and Technohexen in general."

Naito spread her mouth horizontally and waved a hand dismissively.

And next to her, Naruze pointed at Asama.

"Asama is a shrine maiden, so she would be classified as a shaman. Shinto is polytheistic and its gods have the primitive origin of being born from natural phenomena, so it's actually a fairly old type."

"Using that sort of classification, I suppose it would be. To put it another way, we 'have a long history'."

"Judge. In Europe, you have the shamans who led the various rites and then the druids and elementalors that grew from that. You could call them the old magic users. But..." Naruze shrugged. "When the Tsrhc religion spread across Europe, Rome made it their national religion, the churches built a cooperative support system, and the musicians were obligated to assist each other. The old magic users had been entirely separate without any kind of system like that, so the people moved on to the more convenient option and those magic users faded away," she explained. "But tightening down on it too much would lead to resistance, so some level of flexibility was necessary. Y'know, how that works, right? Like with clothes?"

Asama thought about that.

...Is that how it works?

It seemed wrong to her.

"I don't want my clothes to shift out of place, so I keep them pretty tight. Or rather, my body presses against them on its own..."

Everyone stopped moving.

Confused by this unexpected reaction, Asama also stopped moving.

Adele was the first to move again. She silently approached the barrel of sake and dunked her cup in it instead of scooping the sake out with the ladle.

"J-just so you know, the bagginess of my clothes since starting high school isn't because I can't find ones that fit! It's to match the connections for the mobile shell!"

Asama had apparently reopened an old wound. But as they tried to work out what to say and oddly found everyone's eyes focused on everyone else's chests, Kimi walked up to Asama's left side.

She tilted her head.

"Asama, do you really keep your clothes that tight?"

"Yes, I have several divine protections in place since I don't wear a bra...but to avoid stiff shoulders, I tighten them to fit my body and distribute the burden under the arms and on down."

"Hmm," said Kimi before suddenly reaching for Asama's back.

"Eh?"

Before Asama could do anything, the control component on her back sent instructions to the hard point parts on her sides.

Those two parts instantly slid down somewhat. This tugged the shrine maiden inner suit toward her sides, which seemed to cause the shape of her breasts to show through even more clearly than usual.



"Oh, dear."

With Kimi's voice and a popping sound from the collar and chest of the suit, the chest came open.

"Kyaaaah!"

"Heh heh. What's this? You're using a divine protection to maintain their shape, aren't you? That's the kind of boobs care I like to see!"

"Y-you...!"

Asama held her chest while the thin *obi* part came undone and the suit below it split all the way down to below her navel.

Kimi must have given a random instruction because the wide parts tried to slide further back and she had to quickly stop them.

"Wh-what are you doing, Kimi!? And stop sketching this, Naruze!"

"That's a trick I've never seen before. I need to try it with Margot sometime."

"No, I think you need a whole lot of inner pressure for it to work. Oh, but, Ga-chan, not many people would be able to do that to Asama-chi, so keep that in mind when using the material."

That was true. A Musashi resident's hard point parts managed their divine protections for life support and other things and they were linked to things like the financial system necessary for everyday life. They were locked down when removed, but when worn, they could only be controlled by the wearer and...

"Outside of emergencies, the only other people who can use mine are my dad, Kimi, Toori-kun, and Mito."

Asama watched as everyone except Kimi immediately formed a scrum.

Eh? she thought while sweating.

...D-did I say something wrong!?

The term "two in a row!" came to mind, but it was too late now.

With an odd impatience in her heart, she called out to the others.

"Umm..."

Mitotsudaira looked up from the scrum and held out her right palm.

She was telling her to wait. When the wolf sank back into the scrum, Naito began speaking.

"...Why would she let him do that?"

"What, is she saying she's ready to do it at any time?"

"I will defend her since I was on the list too, but I do think there is something wrong with her brain if she doesn't even question that decision."

"D-don't worry... Toori-kun wouldn't...treat her...badly."

...Suzu-san, they're going to take that the wrong way!

Asama wondered if she should warn her.

But as the others began nodding to each other, Kimi breathed through her nose and spoke.

"Well, I imagine she just hasn't changed the settings since we were kids and had things set up to test out the divine protections we made."

"Yes... Well, I guess that is part of it..."

There were a lot of reasons like that, so it was hard to sum up succinctly.

But everyone seemed to accept that and Naruze nodded as their representative.

"Don't worry. We understand."

As soon as she said that, blood burst from the Doujin Technohexen's nose. From both nostrils.

Everyone cried out as Naruze held her nose from below.

"D-don't worry, Asama. We understand, so...yes, there's nothing to worry about."

"Now I'm two or three times *more* worried!"

"Calm down," said Naito as she passed Naruze a reduction cooling spell. "Let's get back to what I was saying about tightening down too much being a bad idea. ...Tsirhc may not allow heretics, but they do allow pagans. That's what led

to the whole Reformation, but while the church was corrupt and using the inquisition to get away with their corruption, some pagans were treated like monsters and were persecuted due to the ancient dragon invasion."

And...

"That led to all the various old magic users being called Technohexen."

Most everyone knows that much, thought Naito.

But the rest was more specialized knowledge.

"And then, with the Technohexen hunts and whatnot, the Technohexen grew defiant and Tsrhc's Reformation began at about the same time, so they began reassessing it all."

"You mean the Peace of Augsburg, don't you? The Protestant advocate, Luther, spoke with the Catholics and got them to accept Protestantism."

"Right, right. The Technohexen hunts continued after that as part of the history recreation, but they reaffirmed that pagans were acceptable and the Technohexen began 're-paganizing' themselves."

The Technohexen said that Tsrhc had been trying to split the Technohexen between the old and the new, just like Tsrhc had been. But...

...Some things just wouldn't work without that division.

Everything had two sides to it, with different advantages and purposes.

The whole could not be supported with just one or the other.

And the persecution of Technohexen had continued even as they "re-paganized" and lived among the people.

That was why Naito and Naruze had ended up with Musashi, but...

"Anyway, when we 're-paganized', the Technohexen needed to show our worth so the people would accept us."

"Like what?" asked Adele.

Naruze responded while drawing a hat on her Magie Figur. It was a white

bonnet.

"The simplest example would be Weiss Techno. ...Those are additive spells that specialize in positive things like healing and regeneration. It is primarily made up of healing spells, so it is useful in supporting the Tsirhc religion."

"And Schwarz Techno is reductive, so the Schwarz Hexen often joined the national defense organizations and other combat groups to hunt down resisting Technohexen or fight against mysterious phenomena."

"So," said Naruze. "It was split into Weiss and Schwarz. And the Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen who follow that rule are what you could call the new Technohexen."

"Then what about Wild Kamelie...?" asked Mitotsudaira with a frown. "Is she the old kind of Technohexen without that division?"

"Exactly. Most of the Technohexen from Europe are that way. Wild Kamelie's techniques tend toward the Schwarz Hexen side of things, so that's what she's registered as on the Musashi. But..." Naito nodded. "I expect her to use both spell types in battle, so...we can't let our guard down even with the two of us together."

Musashi's nights truly began at 10.

That was the curfew, so the gates between wide blocks and long blocks closed then.

Of course, people still had jobs to do and cargo had to be transported, so it was still possible to move between blocks with permission. There were just far fewer people after 10.

But things were different for visitors from outside. The curfew strictly applied to them unless they had a Musashi resident escorting them.

And the Musashi currently had a lot of visitors from Aki. Thus, a warning was broadcast across Asakusa, Shinagawa, Takao, and Oume after 8 at night.

"This is a notice from 'Shinagawa'. It is now past 8 PM. In another hour, the visitors on the Shinagawa derrick mast observation platform and on the bow

deck will not have enough time to return to Tama on foot. ...I can imagine some of the horrible things which will happen to you if that occurs, but you would be better off not knowing. Over."

"That was blunt!" said the cargo workers on Shinagawa.

"That's 'Shinagawa'-san for you! She's so cool in a careless sort of way!"

"And she's so much cooler on the days when 'Musashi'-san is being difficult!"

"Her criminal law attacks are nice, but this is the side of her I like best!"

Someone stood on the derrick mast observation platform that overlooked that discussion.

She was a slender girl, but she had firearm equipment hanging from her skirt.

"I would prefer to avoid having the name Suzuki Magoichi listed in the arrest records..."

She smiled bitterly and looked down from the railing, but then she looked to her left shoulder.

There was nothing there, but then three *insha kotob* appeared there.

They floated and rotated while displaying something: wing-like rifle symbols.

She called to them as they spun around her face as if to get a good look at her.

"Yatagarasu. Remember this place."

She narrowed her emotionless eyes and looked out horizontally.

"Because we could set history in motion from a position higher than this."

Magoichi rested her elbows on the railing and pulled her hips back.

She looked up into the sky.

The stealth barrier surrounding Musashi's night was a vast presence.

...It makes this feel like its own little world...

She felt like the outside world had disappeared, but that was incorrect. The transport and diplomatic ships that connected the Musashi with the outside were opening holes in the barrier to move in and out and informational toriis in

the city displayed the sky and scenery of the outside world.

The people of Musashi saw this as a "location" that connected to the outside world.

...It's so complicated.

It felt enclosed and protected to the people outside.

But did the people inside only see it as a room they could easily move in and out of?

If so...

"The other nations may hold a mistaken view of Musashi."

Magoichi thought from her position as a name inheritor.

She thought about how the leaders, officers, and other high-ranking members of other nations had to view Musashi.

The Far East was currently under the other nations' provisional rule, their lord was in Mikawa which was a neutral area between the Testament Union Tsrhc nations and P.A. Oda, and Musashi was the only official territory they were allowed.

...Because they had no military power, their reservations and the Musashi relied on the other nations for their continued existence.

The Musashi was seen as somewhat creepy and pitiable, like the Flying Dutchman that had become a ghost ship and wandered the sea for all eternity.

But now that she was here, she found it to be a lively and peaceful world.

She wanted to compare it to the ark found in the Vetus Testament, but...

"They have almost no status as a nation."

They could not exist in history.

They should not exist, but they did anyway because they were convenient.

"Just like Mikawa's ley line reactors or the Technohexen."

But what would make the world understand that?

...Musashi would have to take a more proactive stance.

Would that ever happen?

She knew enough of its history to assume not.

In its 160 years of provisional rule, Musashi had never resisted. However...

"Yatagarasu."

Magoichi called out to the *insha kotobs*.

"If our actions here led Musashi to act...that would be stressful."

The *insha kotobs* spun around in response. All three of them did.

And Magoichi thought of the Musashi like a war god.

It had not actually received the divine protection of a war god.

...But it's elevated.

Magoichi was from a desert people. She had wielded her guns in an endlessly flat expanse of sand and defeated her distant enemies.

In the flat desert, the slightest rise or dip was a crucial factor. If she could have viewed or fired on her enemy from above, she would have won a unilateral victory and felt like she had a war god on her side.

So she sought the sky. And that was what she saw horizontally from herself now.

"———"

It was the sky. Magoichi looked up from her elevated position.

She saw the dim white defense barrier. That wall seemed to protect the Musashi, but did not fully do so. She narrowed her eyes and spoke as she looked up at it.

"Is that what Musashi would view as a war god?"

She saw a point of black in the sky.

It was a Technohexen's color.

She was so high in the sky that even a sniper like Magoichi could barely make

her out.

A single Technohexen was stopped atop a black *schale besen*.

...Just like a hawk eyeing its prey.

"Now, then."

Magoichi turned around, as if turning away from the sky.

To return to her inn on Murayama, she chose the stairs to descend the derrick mast.

On the way, she spoke quietly.

"What do you call something that chooses to target a war god?"

Naruze felt the tactile feedback.

She had just pulled her feather broom out from the locker that the engine division kept in a phase space.

...Oh?

It was heavy.

But that was not just due to its weight.

...It pulled straight out.

The feather broom did not waver as she pulled it out into the air. It followed the angle of her original pull, so it appeared almost exactly horizontally. It pulled out with the weight and accuracy of something on rails.

Then she viewed the device in front of her.

"You sure treated us to something nice..."

Overall, it looked like a flat boxy quill covered in armor of a similar texture. It seemed a little bigger than its original size.

Naomasa remained seated and took a drink before speaking.

"I didn't mess with the seat, but I added reinforcements below it. It shouldn't feel any different when seated and you won't be able to tell anything has

changed, but you should notice more support from below once you get up to speed."

"...Will they run?"

"I completed a combat proof according to engine division standards."

"I see." Naruze nodded. "So the test run is just for us to get used to them."

"You can complain after flying around some. I'll make some adjustments once you get back. ...So don't hold back once you get up there."

"Judge," she said and Margot smiled after pulling out her own broom to the right.

She turned toward Asama.

"Asama-chi, can you open up the top?"

"You're doing it already?" Asama did not even try to hide her exasperation, but she did clap her hands. "Then how about we all stop by the Blue Thunder? ...I doubt everyone would be satisfied with just the food we have here. We can put in an order on the way and pick it up once we get there."

"Heh heh. And we could always order wine or beer."

"No, no," insisted Asama. Then Naruze made a suggestion while spinning her broom around.

"Want a ride? Although Margot and I can only take one person each."

"Oh, you'll do that?"

Asama was all for it. That seemed a bit casual for a Shinto shrine maiden, but...

...That might be who Asama is outside of her religious rules and official obligations.

Instead of criticizing Asama, Naruze found herself impressed by her own observant eye.

She had become more accepting of a wider range of behaviors from other people.

...Hmm...

She felt like she had gone soft and that displeased her. So...

"Um, Margot, you take Mitotsudaira. You can carry a lot more that way, right?" Naruze was aware she was selfishly taking control. "Now, let's get going. This is our first time using these new versions, so don't expect us to fly like normal. ...This won't be nearly as exciting."

Chapter 5: Warner on the Horizontalt

第五章

『水平上の警告者』



気がつけば
身分は挑戦者ではなく
別のもので
配点（迎撃）

The next thing you know

You are not a challenger

You are something else

Point Allocation (Counterattack)

Asama realized that her decision had been a carefree one but also a very serious one.

She realized this while up in the sky.

She was riding Naruze's feather broom to the Blue Thunder and she was trying to find a comfortable position for her butt.

...Wow.

For Asama Shrine work, she would sometimes ride transport ships and ceremony ships. She was used to high places and speeds, but...

"...Oh."

They were flying.

But this flight did not slide through the sky. It cruised like a ship.

They flew by continually accelerating to constantly push themselves forward. The Technohexen broom could of course float and that gave it some stability, but the way it seemed to constantly push at them and swing them around reminded Asama of something.

"This is a lot like running, isn't it?"

"Eh!? What!? I can't hear you!"

The wind and their speed kept her voice from reaching the girl in front of her.

As they passed the night stealth barrier, Naruze turned back to speak, but instead of sending her voice toward Asama, it was more like she placed it in the air where it was swept back to Asama's ears.

"There isn't a rear seat, so sit on the broom cowl and grab onto either side! Do you have the cowl between your legs!?"

“I’m fine!”

Naruze’s eyebrows rose at Asama’s response.

Thanks to all her training with Shinto prayers, Asama’s voice had apparently reached her. Naruze showed a smile on her lips.

“In that case.”

And with that, they *flew*.

...*Wah*.

They were in the sky. And quite high up at that.

In no time, they left the Asama Shrine behind. Asama was used to seeing Okutama’s surface from transport ships and such, but now it grew more distant from a diagonal perspective.

...*Oh, we’re already near the bow.*

Her senses could not keep up with their speed. It felt like they were already at Tama by the time she saw them leaving Okutama. So she looked forward.

“———”

Naruze had opened several Magie Figurs.

Since they had taken an unscheduled flight into the sky, she was quickly checking what course to take. Based on the symbols and route displayed there, she seemed to have chosen a route that cut across Okutama’s bow from left to right and flew diagonally right toward Tama.

Those two likely discussed this kind of thing while doing their job.

...*Although she only ever seems to talk about her doujins at the academy.*

But she checked their route and selected a course with the technique of a pro.

She was doing as good a job as any adult.

That was when Asama realized she was somewhat tense.

The rapid ascent had probably surprised her. She could feel the tenseness in her knees as well as in the hands holding onto the edge of the *schale besen*.

But she doubted that was necessary.

A delivery pro was taking her to the Blue Thunder.

So she shook her head and fixed her disheveled hair. She tightened the grip of her hands and leaned forward.

In front of her, Naruze's wings had closed to reduce air resistance.

The voluminous plumage gave off the scent of the shampoo those two used.

It was morning glory.

That flower bloomed in the early morning, so did it hold special meaning in the delivery business that got to work early?

Asama did not know.

She felt like everyone tried to find meaning in everything.

So she faced forward through the wings and then looked to the side.

As the scenery slowly flowed by below them, it turned to the right such that Musashino's bridge and stern were visible to the left.

...Ohh.

Large ships were restricted from flying near Musashino's bridge to avoid doing damage to it. So it was rare to see that bridge-shaped ship's bridge from this close.

They were probably about 100 meters above the deck.

And their view slowly but surely turned in front of that giant structure.

"Ah."

The broom was tilting in the opposite direction. It was banking to the left to change course and fly along Tama's port side.

The rear of the broom seemed to slide a bit and wind hit its belly.

"..."

Twice, they skidded rightward through the sky.

But Asama was holding onto the cowling. She had reflexively lifted up her

hips, so her butt did not hit the cowling and bounce. Also...

...Ah.

She saw Naruze's wings. The main wings were extended straight back as if to hold Asama on either side.

Was that supposed to help Asama stay balanced? Or was it used to control the broom?

Asama did not know that either.

However...

"———"

She thought she heard someone calling to her from the right.

She looked that way and saw Naito and Mitotsudaira.

Mitotsudaira had strapped herself on using luggage belts.

They were crossed in front of her like seatbelts, so they formed an X fairly high up on her. Seeing that, Naruze wrote something on a Magie Figur and passed it back to Asama.

"Tortoise shell?"

Asama chose not to respond, but this was going to end up in a doujin either way.

Naito's broom flew up alongside Naruze's.

"———"

But her voice could not reach them.

Of course, that meant nothing to Naruze whose wings clearly nodded.

...Here we go.

Their broom and Naito's broom crossed paths as they flew in a gentle curve toward Tama.

They descended toward their destination in perfect harmony.

The aerial ship of Musashi always had work to do, even at night.

With maintenance, construction, transport, guard, and government work, there were always people working a wide variety of jobs in the streets at night.

So along the main roads, the shops stayed open even as the curfew approached.

There was one that stayed open all night long. That illuminated wooden space was located on Tama.

It was the bakery/café known as the Blue Thunder.

There were a few customers inside.

There were no families or groups of friends at this time. Everyone was stopping by to refuel on the way to work, so the counter in the back filled up first.

Among them, someone stood in front of the register counter for bread sales.

It was Tenzou.

Watanabe had given him a mission.

...I must report to Watanabe-sama if Naito-dono and Naruze-dono show up here at night.

Of course, he could not stake out the place forever. So...

“Excuse me. I am from the 1st Special Duty Unit of the Chancellor’s Officers.”

Tenzou produced a sign frame for the automaton at the counter while making sure the others could not see.

It displayed his identification. It provided the emblem of the 1st Special Duty Unit, his name, his ID number, and a stamp confirming that he was on an approved mission.

He wanted to make sure no one else saw this to ensure no one mistakenly thought the store was involved in some kind of crime. But...

...This automaton...

Thanks to the 1st Special Duty Unit’s information network, he knew this was

an unidentified automaton. And that the Blue Thunder's manager had claimed to be her guardian to ensure her safety.

But, thought Tenzou. *Toori-dono has started coming here to see this automaton.*

Yet Tenzou was fairly certain that boy had not come here even once since that incident 9 years before.

...Should I just chalk this up to people changing with time?

That said...

"...Who are you?"

Tenzou only had one thought when the automaton asked that out of the blue.

...Sh-she really is a lot like her...

He was hesitant to say who that "her" was.

Their class had set up a mental dividing line between the events of 9 years ago and now, so there was no point in bringing it up again here.

But the automaton asked a question.

"If you will not answer me, then I will have to guess. Is that okay with you?"

"...Huh? Guess?"

He just about asked what that meant.

But the automaton slowly raised her right index finger, pointed at him, and gave him a sharp look.

"...Yamamoto."

That was wrong.

It was not even close, so Tenzou fell silent. Then the automaton nodded twice.

"...What do you need, Yamamoto-sama?"

"Eh!? You took that as a yes!?"

"Then I shall introduce you to our new product."

The automaton expressionlessly moved her right arm around toward the bread shelf behind her.

The movement must have exceeded the limits of the shoulder joint because a metallic scraping came from the shoulder and the arm came off.

The arm was covered with black plastic and she had swung it with plenty of force, so it crashed into the floor.

Tenzou heard the undeniable sound of something heavy hitting the wooden floor.

...Eh?

He had difficulty reacting because it was all so sudden, but...

“A-are you okay!?”

He leaned forward to look behind the counter.

Just then, something like a giant spider leaped from behind the counter and at his face. He had no time to dodge, so it latched onto his face.

“Nwohhhhh!?”

He quickly grabbed it, pulled it off, and slammed it down onto the counter.

“Oh, that is my arm. I am still having issues with control, so it moves around on its own when it comes off.”

A right arm used its hand to crawl every which way along the counter. The connector on the end produced a hissing sound like a snake and P-01s looked over at Tenzou.

“Now, Yamamoto-sama, allow me to introduce our new product.”

“...Eh!? You’re still doing that!?”

“Of course we are. The Blue Thunder is a leftov-...a bakery and café.”

“Y-you almost said something devastating, didn’t you!?”

“Now, now,” said the automaton while the right hand began checking the edge of the counter as if licking it. It may have been looking for a spot to jump down.

But P-01s did not seem to care.

“The thing is, we have a new product today.”

“I’m, uh, not really...”

He meant to say he was not interested.

But P-01s tilted her head and looked up at him.

“Do you not want the new product?”

“How about, um, I try it some other time?”

Why was he trying so hard to be polite? But the automaton nodded in understanding. She then pulled a paper bag from below the counter.

“So you do not want to try it right away. Then I will wrap your leftov-...your newly-released product so you can try it tomorrow. ...That will be 500 yen.”

Naruze put her *schale besen* away in its phase space and opened the Blue Thunder’s door.

She heard the door’s bell ring and she sensed Asama, Margot, and Mitotsudaira behind her.

“Is our order ready!?”

As soon as she stepped inside, she saw Tenzou hanging his head while paying 500 yen to P-01s.

She shut the door.

“Oops,” said Asama as her chest bumped into Naruze from behind. “Wh-what is it, Naruze?”

“That is some nice reference material pressing into my wings, but Tenzou is in there being a loser.”

“Ga-chan, the start of that sentence doesn’t lead into the end, but you say Tenzou’s being a loser?”

“Judge. He’s definitely being a loser. I could tell right away.”

“Oh.” Mitotsudaira nodded. “You mean P-01s. There’s no helping that.

Tenzou can never defeat that type.”

Naruze wondered if anyone could defeat her, but she still had a lot of her life left to live. She guessed that she might run across the truly unexpected at some point. And...

“I had a feeling going in there would get us caught up in it.”

“You are correct there, Naruze. We should wait a bit.”

“In that case,” said Margot as she put her broom away in its phase space and opened a Magie Figur. She was probably sending Naomasa the output readings from the flight here.

Naruze did the same while Asama took care of some shrine management work.

“Me too then...”

Mitotsudaira opened a sign frame to manage her corporation.

...Are we all like this?

Everyone had some kind of foundation for themselves.

For Naito and Naruze, rising in the delivery business rankings would only give them a short career that did not make much money. Compared to that...

...One of them is Musashi's Shinto representative and the other is first in line to ruling the Far East...

Naruze was not jealous of those positions. She knew how much work went into them.

And while she could go for a flight to blow off some steam if something happened, people with more important positions did not have that luxury.

“Oh, is that why they blast things with arrows and eat tons of meat?”

“Wh-what kind of realization is that!?”

“It's about your circumstances. ...So do you think we can go in yet?”

Naruze glanced at the others.

The three of them looked up from their work to return the glance.

Their eye contact told her to open the door, so she placed her hand on it and pushed it open.

Straight ahead, the ninja and the automaton had two glasses and a bottle on the counter.

Margot grabbed the doorknob from behind Naruze and shut the door.

Finally, Margot spoke without turning back toward the others.

“Yes. That was a good decision.”

“It was, Margot. A very good decision.”

“Wh-what was that just now?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Water.”

“Water!?”

“Yeah, water.”

Margot was wise to not elaborate.

But Asama tilted her head and spoke.

“We can’t get in like this...”

“And it’s been a while since we got here, so why haven’t any of the customers inside come out?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Either they’re afraid moving will get them targeted too, or they came to the Blue Thunder because they enjoy watching this.”

“I see.” Asama opened a sign frame to check the time. “Oh, the evening 8:30 bell is about to ring.”

The morning 8:30 bell meant the start of the work day while this one indicated the start of the night hours.

It came in advance to the final bell at 10:00 and it informed everyone it was time to head back home. It had apparently started out as the sound of a cannon being fired, but the academy bell was used on the Musashi.

And once the 8:30 bell rang, night guards made up of the Chancellor Officers and volunteers began patrolling the city.

While it came shortly before time to sleep, that bell produced a lot of movement.

Before the city went to sleep, people moved through the roads. Naruze quite liked that atmosphere. Eisen closed for the day between 6 and 9, so she would often descend to the city or travel between dinner and the bathhouse while listening to this bell.

She often stayed up all night, so this bell told her the night was beginning.

But today, she would be flying up above those patrolling guards on her modified *schale besen*.

...Am I being overly self-conscious if I'm afraid I'll stand out?

Regardless, she had to complete her business as quickly as possible.

She reached for the doorknob and pushed the door open.

"It's probably fine by now. ...Let's go!"

The ninja and the automaton were facing each other with a row of empty plates on the counter.

Naruze wordlessly and quietly closed the door.

She had tried to avoid being noticed, but she had a feeling the automaton had started to turn in her direction.

She heard Mitotsudaira's voice behind her.

"N-Naruze? Did something happen?"

"Judge. ...She's started something new."

"Eh? Something new? What does that mean?"

"...Asama, if you're that interested, then stop by here tomorrow. But do it alone."

"I see," said Asama just before they heard the automaton's voice from beyond the door.

"I know you are there, Nargat-sama, Narooze-sama."

“...I think she’s gotten our names so wrong they’re actually almost right again, Ga-chan.”

“Shh. Don’t react.”

Then they heard another voice from beyond the door.

“Oh, Naruze-dono, Naito-dono.”

...Why are you calling us!?

Mal-Ga: “I’m going to draw a sequel now!”

10ZO: “Is that a combined threat and confession to a crime!?”

But Asama and Mitotsudaira stepped back from behind her.

“Why are you keeping your distance?”

Naruze grabbed Margot’s shoulders and turned around.

And something happened just as they took a step toward the road where Asama and Mitotsudaira were.

“...Eh?”

She sensed something cold to the left.

It was like the night air had come to stop and become a cold mass.

It was the advance warning of something breaking the sound barrier and flying their way.

In this case...

...A cannon blast!?

That should not have been possible.

And yet it flew down the road and scored a direct hit.

Inside the Blue Thunder, it was sound that washed over Tenzou.

Next to the counter was a two-person table by a window that bordered the road. That glass shattered and the front door hopped up vertically.

The road-side wall clearly strained diagonally, but it was not actually

destroyed. The movement was from it snapping back into shape after the straining was over. He heard the roof's slates falling thanks to the building's shaking and a few pieces of firewood fell from the storage shelves below the ceiling.

And the explosive blast outside gathered up the glass shards.

"Excuse me!!"

Tenzou clapped his hands and stomped his right heel on the floor in front of the counter.

Immediately, a row of floorboards rose up to form a wall.

This was one use for the ninja technique known as Tatami Flipping.

The wall defended against what tried to get in through the entrance, so glass shards and window frame fragments struck the underside of the floorboards.

...Did I block it all!?

Just as he wondered that, a small light bounced up overhead.

It was a shard of glass.

It was the size of a knife and it had ricocheted off the raised floorboards. It flew up to the tall ceiling and passed by over his head.

"Oh, no..."

As the wind died down, Tenzou quickly turned around just in time to see someone there.

It was the Blue Thunder's manager.

The middle-aged woman wore a blue apron and the glass shard was flying toward her.

"Ohh, ohh."

She lightly caught it between her right index and middle fingers. She then served a customer the bacon steak on the plate in her left hand and she looked to Tenzou.

"Tenzou-kun, can you fix the floor? If not, I'm sending the 1st Special Duty

Unit a bill.”

“Ah! Not to worry! I can indeed fix it!”

...I can't do anything careless in front of her.

As he thought that, the manager smiled at him.

“I guess the bill for the window will have to go to Almirante. As for what's happening out front...”

Yes.

What had happened?

An alarm and a fire bell belatedly started to ring and a sign frame appeared next to Tenzou's face.

It was from Watanabe and it instructed him to provide a report on the situation. However...

...Out front...

“Yeah,” said the manager. She faced the front of the shop despite the raised floorboards blocking the view. “Tomo-chan really doesn't hold back...”

“A-Asama-dono did this!?”

Asama: “I heard that! And no, I didn't!”

She had to correct me?

What did this mean?

The automaton named P-01s tilted her head.

“At least things are lively around here.”

Mitotsudaira saw something within the ringing alarms.

Something had flown in from the right. That meant from the bow since they had been facing the Blue Thunder.

When she looked back in that direction, she saw a valley of pale light created from a row of defense barriers in front of all the stores along the road.

It was likely an artillery shell that had flown in from the faint darkness beyond that.

Naito commented from behind her.

“That was a physical currency shell that’s banned these days. I think it was a re-pressed 1230s mark.”

“I’m not sure what that means, but it must have been made of silver,” said Asama who stood to their right.

...When did she get there?

Mitotsudaira had sensed a moving presence just before the attack hit.

A moment later, Asama had been facing the bow with her right hand held straight forward.

As a result, the ground was badly torn up in front of her.

That was the side effect of blocking the flying object with a defense barrier.

The destructive power had been sent skyward and a deep scar had been left in the ground.

Asama’s defenses were of course powerful.

Nothing at all had happened to the ground at her feet or at the feet of her companions.

But the damage directly below her outstretched hand stretched back to either side in an upside-down V-shape.

It was like they stood at the sandbank in the middle of a river of destruction.

Which meant...

...It wasn’t on the level of a quasi-anti-ship cannon, but it at least rivals an anti-god of war cannon?

“Uh, I guess I should ask: Tomo, are you okay?”

“Umm, why do you ‘guess’ you should ask? ...But, yes. It was a silver shell, and silver is well suited for purification. It seems to have been made to detonate when it hit by transferring its momentum into destructive power, so I purified

that cleanly off to the left and right.”

But...

“I was in a hurry and I wish I could have stopped it with a proper barrier. I protected everyone, but there was some damage to the surrounding stores.”

The contents of her calm analysis were frightening.

After all...

“...That means we were indiscriminately fired on, doesn’t it?”

“No, this wasn’t indiscriminate,” replied Naito.

She used her wings to step toward the bow. She passed by Asama on the left and hopped over the damage to the ground.

Similarly, Naruze passed by Asama on the right and advanced.

And Naruze asked a question of the darkness toward the bow.

“With the alarm and fire bell ringing, we’re going to hear guard sirens before long. ...Musashi is a refuge for Technohexen, so is there any reason to make the life of a Technohexen here more difficult?”

She then spoke a name.

“Wild Kamelie.”

Naito raised her eyebrows somewhat and felt a cold sweat in her heart.

...She’s making her attack now?

This was a clear choice on the woman’s part.

They had been naïve to assume the battle would come tomorrow since that was the day to apply for the tester rights.

They had planned to challenge her to the battle in the early morning when the skies were not crowded. That was the polite thing to do for challengers like them and they had assumed Wild Kamelie would not want to disturb Musashi’s sky.

But she had different plans.

She had given them time to gain their *schale besens*, but she had challenged them before they had finished fine-tuning them.

Without that fine-tuning done, their brooms were unstable. They did not have the right power balance or even appropriate center of gravity adjustments.

Their old brooms would have been easier to ride and more comforting.

...But they wouldn't give us enough speed.

The ones they had now would give them speed, but they were essentially masses of unpredictable thrust.

They had carried Asama and Mitotsudaira on a low-speed flight which was relatively safe. But in the high-mobility of combat, an improperly-adjusted acceleration system could send the broom flying uncontrollably.

Wild Kamelie had made her attack now because she knew that.

“But we can't say she's playing dirty.”

This was a battle. One on which they had bet a turning point in their lives.

They could always retry or crawl back up after defeat, but winning would open up their future.

The battle had begun from the moment they had strengthened their brooms to catch up with their opponent.

Upgrading their equipment was the same as working to overcome their opponent's combat techniques.

So...

“Defeating our upgraded equipment is the same as defeating us with combat techniques.”

Official battles did have rules, but...

...If you need those to protect you, you aren't really the top of the rankings, are you?

Wild Kamelie had fallen victim to several “accidents” and been targeted in corporate conflicts.

If those had defeated her, she could not just say the rules did not apply to them.

To be ranked #1 meant to overcome any and all challenges.

“So that initial greeting was meant as a kindness.”

Naito had to agree with Naruze there.

“Let’s do this.”

They would fine-tune their brooms as much as possible while in flight.

Then they would do as much as possible in the fight.

“Judge, let’s go, Margot.”

They saw a light on the distant bow.

It was an acceleration light to send someone up into the sky where the sirens and alarms rang.

It struck the Musashi’s floor.

“...That was fast!”

A line of light rose into the dimly-lit night sky with an orange tail trailing behind it.

Wild Kamelie was telling them to fly after her.

Asama saw the two Technohexen turn back toward her.

No, not just toward her. Toward “everyone”, which included Mitotsudaira.

By now, the others would be arriving from the Asama Shrine on foot. And as a representative of that “everyone”, Asama spoke.

“Don’t worry.” She clapped her hands so the sound reverberated through the air. “May any hardships experienced in the sky be purified.”

Naruze and Naito’s expressions changed at that. Naruze’s eyebrows rose in a small smile.

“You’re not going to pray for our victory?”

“Shinto is about purification. All Shinto can do is purify away any excess burden on you so that you can draw out your true strength.”

So...

“Achieving victory is up to the two of you, Naito and Naruze.”

“Asama-chi,” said Naito with her teeth showing through the corners of her mouth. “We’ll be back with that victory.”

With that, wind exploded before Asama’s eyes.

The two of them spread their wings, held their brooms like spears, and launched themselves into the sky.

The black and white Technohexen pursued the camellia flower.

Chapter 6: Blossoming Girls in an Enclosed Place

第六章

『困い場の咲き娘達』



勝ってくるねと言ってみたけど
さてどうしよう
配点（要努力）

I said we would be back with that victory

But what do we do about this?

Point Allocation (Requires Effort)

Musashi's sky felt so very high. That was because the inner diameter of the stealth barrier was based on the width of the Musashi.

It opened to a full width of nearly 2 kilometers, but the Musashi was only about 800 meters tall. The difference created a cylinder that measured about 600 meters top to bottom.

Currently, three figures were racing across the Musashi at high speed.

A Technohexen in black flew out front.

She was followed by black wings and gold wings.

The Technohexen in the lead was sitting up some and looked relaxed.

The pursuing two had the gold wings in front and the black wings following behind.

The three of them soared through the windy sky from the bow and to the starboard side of Takao which was to the back and right of the Musashi as a whole. The leading Technohexen made a shallow turn to the right, but she did not lose any speed.

She forcibly pushed her acceleration forward and slid to the side while moving through the air. As for the two behind her...

"Kh...!"

The gold wings broom bounced during the turn.

It looked like she had tripped over a rock despite being in the air. Her broom briefly lost power and bounced.

Each time it happened, the leading Technohexen would gain an even larger lead and the leftward-sliding brooms would bring them closer to the stealth barrier.

“Margot!” shouted the black wings behind her. “I’ll take the lead for this corner!”

The black wings flew out ahead, so the gold wings nodded once and cleared the way ahead without lowering her speed.

They switched who was in front and who was in back.

The black wings gave a twisting swing of her white broom and nailed the proper escape angle for the corner. The gold wings turned the tip of her broom forward as if to connect to that.

“Ga-chan! Move on ahead!”

“Judge!”

The black wings accelerated. And...

“Here goes!”

On her white broom, the black wings drew a line with the pen in her right hand. That was...

“A similar spell summoning!”

With that, the line multiplied. There were now 8 of them.

The black wings scattered copper coins from her right sleeve so they reached that bundle of lines. And...

“Herrlich!”

With that call of completion, the 8 coin bullets flew toward the leading Technohexen. And they did not fly in straight lines. The guide lines altered the trajectories of the octuple shots.

They flew. And...

“Hit her!”

Naruze watched her attack power fly toward the enemy.

The 8 flights drew separate arcs through the air as they pursued Wild Kamelie.

They were not homing shots. They were controlled shots that had their lines

inputted in advance.

The 8 ether lines trailing behind them seemed to expand for a moment, and...

“Go at her all at once!”

As if responding to that cry, the 8 lights intersected and accelerated.

They pursued the enemy like hounds.

But Naruze did not watch them. She had something else to do within her high-speed movement.

...Adjust my broom!

Her broom was currently taking a right turn through the sky on the rear starboard end of Takao. Okutama and Oume’s sterns were visible up ahead and it would be a straight line from here.

It was not her broom’s stability that allowed her to safely move ahead on that turn.

It was her lack of speed.

She was drawing out her acceleration spell more strongly than usual, but it was being restrained by the cowling.

She of course had decent speed, but she could not catch up to Wild Kamelie in a straightaway. She needed Margot to pull her along.

So while she flew, she adjusted the aperture of the nozzle guard on the rear of the cowling. She compared a graph of the inertial forces on the broom with a graph of the acceleration necessary to escape them and she made sure there was no waste in the nozzle guard aperture.

“...This is a real pain, isn’t it?”

Generally, the guard was kept open at low speeds where she swung the broom around and closed at high speeds.

After all, fixing the nozzle guard open would expose it to air resistance.

Conversely, closing the nozzle guard would cause the acceleration spell to interfere with the inside of the guard while swinging the broom around in a turn.

But she did not have time to handle it manually. So she incorporated patterns into the spell data needed to automate it and she adjusted that.

...I'm in battle right now.

For now, she only had to create three patterns: low speed, high speed, and emergency evasive action begun from high speed. She also needed patterns to connect those three together. There were a lot of those in-between patterns and her speed would rise if she adjusted everything to make the best use of the broom's power.

Naruze left those in-between patterns to the automatic processing and flew forward.

Margot would be doing the same thing behind her.

So...

"Ga-chan! I'm moving out ahead!"

Ahead, the 8 lights were just about to reach Wild Kamelie.

Whether those would hit or not, this was their chance to safely swap positions.

So Naruze slid to the right to open the way.

Gold wings and a black cowl swooped into the position she had just vacated.

The movement was different from before.

It was more stable than when Naruze had passed her before.

...Way to go.

Her partner would not act unless she had decided it was okay.

She had to have been even more confident than before that it was okay for her to take the lead.

So Naruze gave her the lead and opened a Magie Figur to settle on her high-speed settings.

Just then...

“Ga-chan!”

She heard Margot’s voice.

“...Oh, no!!”

Naito opened three firing Magie Figurs and prepared to fire.

She targeted Wild Kamelie who Naruze’s controlled shots were pursuing.

Out ahead, Wild Kamelie was leaving the rear of Okutama on the Oume side.

Naito knew she needed to aim for the air a bit to Wild Kamelie’s right.

Wild Kamelie’s course would take her to the rear port corner of the stealth barrier, so she would eventually have to turn to the right.

So Naito would aim to the right.

Naruze must have predicted that because her controlled shots mostly attacked Wild Kamelie from the left.

Naito only had to fire three shots along Wild Kamelie’s course as she went right.

“————”

That was exactly how Wild Kamelie’s back moved.

It was a wingless back. Naito belatedly realized the woman was wearing a Technohexen outfit.

It was a black outfit, but it was not a Schwarz Hexen one.

It was the outfit of the old Technohexen who had worn black to hide their identity. It used unique M.H.R.R. hard points and it bore the Edel Brocken emblem.

That back had just swung to the right. She began the banking necessary for her right cornering.

...This will work!

That was what Naito thought while out ahead. But a moment later...

“———!?”

She saw Wild Kamelie fly out to the right of her *schale besen*.

Naruze looked forward when she heard Margot's warning.

She saw Wild Kamelie's body fly down to the right from her *schale besen*.

But she was not falling.

She held the broom under her right arm and only after swinging around to face them.

She now aimed the *schale besen*'s nozzle in a gunner's style.

...It can't be...

Naruze saw her bullets reach Wild Kamelie.

But she was unable to see the instant in which they actually hit.

That was because she heard a voice from the sky ahead of her.

“...Herrlich.”

It was a low voice. The familiar reverberation belonged to Wild Kamelie. And...

...Oh, no...!

An explosion erupted in front of her.

Ether light burst from the nozzle of the enemy's broom.

“That's a firing spell that converts the broom's acceleration power...!”

The extra push of the broom's acceleration power made this more efficient and powerful than activating a new acceleration spell and firing with that.

Naruze was of course familiar with this usage. Technohexen broom techniques had centuries of history behind them. She could not do it herself because she used a feather broom, but Margot had trained in firing like that.

So she understood this used the same principle as the attack fired on them on the surface earlier. However...

“You aren't supposed to do that in the air...!”

The recoil was incredible. When Margot had trained in it, Naruze had supported her from behind and been blown away.

It was not a technique for use during high-speed mobility.

But Wild Kamelie had done it.

The blast deflected the force of Naruze's bullets.

The explosion of light spread out over a dozen meters and roared into the sky.

Only two things remained: Wild Kamelie who had entered a backwards somersault with the recoil, and...

"Margot!"

Something was flying toward them.

It was a counterattack against Margot who had moved forward.

...A roll of coins!?

It was likely a 500-yen roll of 10-yen coins.

It flew in a straight line toward Margot's chest.

...Wow!

Naito's initial reaction to what had happened was awe.

Wild Kamelie's attack here had been a firing technique known among Technohexen as a "special attack". It was the greatest attack method for those who could use proper brooms.

Margot had of course trained in it, but...

...I never thought you could use it during high-speed mobility...!

But it made sense.

Aerial battles were decided by taking up a position where your opponent's attacks could not reach you. In most cases, that meant placing yourself behind them, but...

"If she can attack from the rear nozzle, then behind her isn't a blind spot...!"

But this was no time to be feeling awed.

The coin roll bullet was clearly going to hit her.

And if it hit her in the chest...

...This counterattack will break my sternum...

Actually, I think it might be worse than that. I might be in trouble. However...

“Margot!”

A voice from the left got her moving.

Naruze’s hand had grabbed onto the back right of Naito’s *schale besen*. And...

“...This way!!”

She forcibly pulled it down and to the right.

Naito relaxed her body instead of fighting it.

“Judge...!”

Naito followed Naruze’s pull by flipping her *schale besen* to the right and down.

She rolled out of the way.

Naruze saw her partner rolling overhead.

She had pulled with her left arm to provide the initial movement. Margot had used that force to roll herself and her broom with her.

She first rotated her broom clockwise with herself as the axis. And before her broom had finished its rotation, she rotated herself as if pulled by the broom.

Instead of a simple barrel roll, she made a sideways rolling slide along a curved path.

After rapidly repeating the process about three times, she fell down below Naruze on the right.

That position would seal off the right hand Naruze used for drawing. She would have preferred to avoid that, but...

...This is no time to be picky!

Because...

“Ga-chan!”

The coin roll bullet that should have hit Margot had shot by on the left.
However...

...It was covered in ether light!

The presence of light implied a spell.

Naruze moved before she could determine what would happen.

She flew down and to the right.

She was putting distance between herself and the area on the left through which the coin roll bullet had flown.

Of course, she was flying at high speed, so she could not move her body to the right so easily.

“...!”

But she managed it.

She knew what came next. This time, Margot grabbed Naruze’s *schale besen* with her left hand.

...And she rotates it!

Margot had not rid herself of the momentum from her earlier roll.

She was rolling further down as if falling in a spin, so she grabbed at Naruze’s *schale besen* and spun it in the same way.

“———!”

As soon as Naruze spun down, she heard a series of solid sounds behind her.

The coin roll bullet had burst after passing her by.

Naruze saw the group of light-enveloped coins when she looked back during her spin.

...Homing bullets!?

This was one of the best and most annoying of Weiss Techno guiding spells. If that had been placed on the roll of coins...

“She had this prepared...!”

50 bullets pursued Naruze. They drew wide arcs but then gathered back together on her location.

After spinning herself around and confirming the location of the enemy bullets, Naruze gave voice to the decision she had made.

“Margot! ...Let’s dodge these!”

The black and gold evasive action was visible from various areas across Musashi.

Tenzou opened the door of Tama’s Blue Thunder, rushed out, and jumped onto the building’s roof.

“That is...”

Dangerous. That was the only way to describe the two moving lights with many lights pursuing them.

Several homing bullets flew along hound-like trajectories from the back of Okutama to the back of Oume. Tenzou knew who the two targets were.

“Naito-dono, Naruze-dono...!”

His voice did nothing more than confirm what he knew.

His words and his power could not reach them.

But a sign frame sent Watanabe’s voice to him.

“Everyone, monitor the situation and remain where you are! If you believe damage is imminent in your assigned region, rapidly press the H-button which stands for ‘hit’! That will inform the bridge!”

“Watanabe-sama, I’ve always wondered. Why do we call it the ‘H-button’ instead of the ‘H-key’?”

“Tradition.”

There's no arguing with it then.

But as he placed his finger on the sign frame's H-button, Tenzou saw something in the night sky. Naito and Naruze forcibly took an evasive trajectory away from the gathering attacks.

They took a single evasive action. The enemy bullets were in pursuit, but...

"Are they going to let them pass by!?"

Naito took action while staying sharply focused.

...This has gotten annoying...!

Wild Kamelie had fired homing bullets.

This was not the first time they had been pursued by bullets like this. In their battles to climb the rankings, they had fought a few enemies with this sort of spell.

But that had usually been just one shot. At most, it had been three or four.

...50 at once!? What kind of final boss is this!?

They had to dodge.

Otherwise, they had no future.

And they knew how to avoid them.

The best method was to shake them with acceleration.

But they could not do that while in the process of fine-tuning their brooms.

They would have to force it.

The method was simple.

"Draw them in and either immediately shake them or dive down...!"

By gathering the enemy bullets together, they could be made to collide with or detonate each other.

To do that, they had to allow the bullets to arrive as close as possible and then use their acceleration to change direction.

So they flew.

The Technohexen pair split a bit to the left and right.

Naruze was worried about moving away from Margot, but...

...That will split the enemy shots in two!

Naruze also extended her main wings and support wings backwards. She relaxed her body as much as she could given the situation and let air enter her feathers.

That was to read the movements of the pursuing coin bullets as much as possible. She would detect the movements of the wind to seek out the flying bullets.

“Here...!”

One of them altered its course as if it had bounced up from the back and it surpassed the others.

It would have been one of the later bullets, but it had changed direction fewer times, which made its movements sharper and faster.

...Can I guide it?

It would be dangerous if that bullet moved too far out front and left the group of bullets. When she made her dodge, she could end up exposing her body to the later coin bullets.

In that case, she thought while taking action.

She lowered her speed so her back would hit that one flying shot.

Naruze’s action only took an instant.

After lowering her speed, she shot downwards.

But she could not reduce her broom’s power.

If she did that, she could never escape after drawing in the bullet.

So she kept the power at full blast and used a different method to reduce just

her speed.

...Air brake!

She increased the air resistance so she and her broom slammed into the air. That was the only method she could currently think of to lower her speed but not her power.

So she did so.

She opened a Magie Figur and opened the rear nozzle guard. She opened the flaps both to the top and bottom to quickly increase air resistance. She also raised her hips to somewhat raise her body. However...

...Down!

She ultimately chose to fly down.

She slammed her upper body down to force the nose down.

She pictured it like stabbing the tip of the broom downwards and she fully opened up the power.

She flew.

“...!”

She first felt the air washing back across the broom.

The broom had been slowed by the greater air resistance, but she was also trying to pass through a thick wall of air.

The broom pierced nose-first into the crossroads between stalling and accelerating.

At the same time, the wind hit her as well.

It was rough enough to make her gasp and it felt like she had jumped into cold water.

It was like being purified.

But the nose arrived beyond that crossroads of acceleration.

While she slammed into the wind and felt it press against her, the nose was calm.

The feeling of new speed reached her from the line of acceleration.

...Wow.

Naruze thought, *I want this.*

If she was to enjoy the seduction and flavor of this speed she felt in her hand...

"...Yes."

It would be best to do as an Edel Brocken tester.

And at the moment, she could tell that crossroads of speed was slowly arriving within reach.

Her acceleration was passing through the air resistance.

But it was too soon.

...Not yet!

The wings extended behind her were important.

Each of the feathers at the end was the same as her hair.

In the rough wind, her hair caught the pressure, was pulled back, and whipped behind her. And...

...There it is!

The one coin bullet arrived.

It shot forward in order to hit her, so...

"Ha ha."

Naruze laughed.

The threat of that flying coin bullet was her ticket to acceleration.

So she drew it in as close as possible and allowed it to touch the end of her feathers.

"————"

She shot forward.

Mitotsudaira watched it happen while she instructed the Knight League to wait.

“It” being an explosion of light in the sky.

First of all, Naito and Naruze bounced and intersected in the air as if dancing.

Then the light pursuing them drew out several lines as it curved and danced. However...

...It can't quite reach.

The brooms hopped up as if laughing and escaping at the last second.

Those were dangerous actions. The tail end would sometimes carelessly rise up and the nose would sometimes start to enter a twisting, horizontal spin. However...

“They’re enduring it,” said Asama

The shrine maiden stood next to Mitotsudaira and worked to set up defense divine protections across the ship.

But just as the final few shots pursued them and tried to reject them, the old Technohexen in the lead took action. She hopped back on her broom and accelerated forward.

“—————!”

She also fired 8 bullets ahead of her.

However, they soon curved around backwards.

But those 8 movements were not just curving lines. They clearly pursued the enemy as a counterattack that would fly straight in toward them.

“...Those are homing bullets!”

The 8 impacts assaulted the two who were trying to avoid the bullets behind them.

We're trapped between them, thought Naito.

...And this must be the real attack...

The enemy had attacked with homing bullets from the front just as they were dodging the ones from behind.

That was well done.

Evading homing bullets required a series of short bursts of speed. It was fast and looked fancy, but you did not move very far and you did not reach your top speed.

So their opponent had fired from the opposite direction just as they made those small movements.

It was especially nasty because it came just as they had worked out their evasion pattern.

But, thought Naito.

“I’ve learned a thing or two as well...!”

It was only a few patterns, but she had put together some settings for short-range acceleration.

From there, she had to link them together for the optimal max acceleration.

“Got it!”

So she moved.

She flew down. She pointed the nose almost straight down as if taking a vertical descent, but...

“Here I go!”

She flew toward Musashi’s city from directly overhead.

Kimi and the others watched the battlefield as they hurried to the Blue Thunder.

They saw it in the sky above Oume.

The towing belt loop carried transport containers through there. The white light of bursting homing bullets appeared in the sky above Oume’s starboard stern.

“Huh...! Look at Naito-san and Naruze-san!”

Adele was pointing her hands in different directions.

One to the sky and another to the surface.

The two acceleration lights had parted vertically.

The Weiss Hexen and Schwarz Hexen were hard to tell apart in the dark night, but...

“Given their speed, I expect Naito went down and Naruze up,” said Naomasa while monitoring their power on a sign frame. She was hurrying her feet along, but she released a long breath of *kiseru* smoke. “Would it count as cheating if I made some adjustments?”

“Heh heh. Those brooms became their responsibility from the moment you handed them over.”

Kimi looked back from the lead and smiled with her eyebrows raised.

She looked up at the roofs of the buildings on either side.

“How about we climb up somewhere?”

“Kimi-san, this isn’t one of our teacher’s classes...”

“But we would have a better view up there, wouldn’t we?”

Meanwhile, a great noise rumbled in from Oume.

They all looked over to see glowing smoke rising from near the derrick mast at Oume’s port stern. And...

“One morrrre.”

Kimi said that while stepping on a nearby firefighting water bucket and jumping from it.

She kicked off the eaves to land on the roof. She then held both hands toward Oume.

“C’mooooon!”

She pulled her arms together as if embracing the distant scene.

Just then, a second roar came from the Oume’s rear city.

But this rumble was different from the first noise.

It was an explosion of air.

Next, they heard a shaking.

It was the sound of wind produced by something flying at high speed. It flew in a straight line from Oume to where they were.

And it did so by flying through the city on Oume's surface.

"Naito."

Kimi crossed her embracing arms below her breasts.

"Even in the surface cities, the central roads are only 2.4 meters. So be careful."

Naito flew through Oume's city at extremely low speed and realized the enemy was attacking again.

In addition to the 8 shots she had fired before, Wild Kamelie was firing more homing bullets.

And she did so while flying alongside Naito from a bit further back in the sky on the port side of Oume.

The homing bullets flew in an arc to attack Naito from behind at a diagonal angle.

Naito could not ascend.

If she did, the bullets fired down at her would be fired horizontally, giving them more speed. However...

...What a pain...!

Among the homing bullets were a few controlled bullets with a simple course change inputted in them.

They flew in from behind to prevent her from lowering her speed.

So she increased her broom's power.

"Oops...!"

The wide blocks were 108 meters long and there was a guard station gate at each end.

She could fly over those by shifting the nose of her broom up just a bit, but...

...Being on her level is dangerous!!

She immediately lowered the nose again.

“Wah!”

She just about crashed into the next wide block’s ground, so she frantically raised the nose.

...But I was moving just fine in the sky before...!

She thought she had pulled off the evasive maneuvers pretty well, but this was what happened when she had to move in units of just a few meters.

She was flying just off the ground. She was so close that the hands on either side of the broom’s cowling could feel the wind produced by the ground’s lift.

She could not extend her legs below the broom anymore. So...

“Toh.”

She gave a flap of her wings. She jumped in the air while the broom seemingly slid across the ground and she used her arms to forcibly lift the broom with her.

It was heavy. That was the weight she was trying to send forward.

She had decent speed. She was currently moving at 240 km/h. That was about 67 m/s.

If she did not have to fly over the wide block gates, she could have cleared each one in about a second and a half.

“Kh...!”

The homing bullets changed their trajectory behind her.

...She can manually control them too!?

They had been fired diagonally after her, but now they pursued her from directly behind.

Wild Kamelie had altered their trajectory and then reapplied the homing.

...That's completely insane...!

It's cheating, thought Naito. But Ga-chan and I have both our spells, so I guess we're cheating too.

So there was no helping it.

Naito responded by speeding up. She was making adjustments to her acceleration spell. While practically bouncing around at high speed, she was beginning to figure out the optimal power output for accelerating to top speed. So...

“Here goes!”

She used the broom's full power.

She picked up speed and pulled away from the homing bullets on her way from Oume's starboard city to the bow.

...This should work!

Her adjustments had given her stability. Also...

“Maybe I can pull it off now...!”

She took a glance back at the enemy bullets pursuing her from behind.

And just then...

“Eh?”

She sensed a shadow.

It was night. And the Musashi was contained within its stealth barrier, so there would be no cloud shadows. The only other options were the derrick mast or...

“...The towing belt loop!?”

Naito did not look overhead.

She could tell what was falling without looking.

She was about to enter the transport district long block and there was something that could fall from above there.

“A container!”

It was Wild Kamelie.

She had fired on the towing belt loop to blast down a large wooden container so it would fall along Naito’s path of acceleration. This container in particular was 20m across.

If Naito slowed, the homing bullets would hit her.

But if she sped up, the container would crush her like a hammer.

And if she tried to escape to the left or right...

...There are buildings...!

She was not in any position to rapidly change trajectory.

And Naito realized something else.

“Ga-chan!”

Wild Kamelie was not targeting her.

The change in the homing bullets’ trajectory had been to drive Naito into the area below the falling container. But that meant something important.

...She didn’t have to be in firing position to change their trajectory like that...!

She had used that trajectory control instead of actually pursuing Naito.

Then where was Wild Kamelie?

...At a location and altitude from which she can fire on the towing belt loop’s containers.

Naito shouted what that meant.

“Wild Kamelie is there, Ga-chan!”

As soon as she did, she flew into the transport district long block.

The shadow of the container plummeted from overhead.

Naruze saw a rectangular object sticking up from Oume’s starboard bow.

The silhouette was clearly larger than the buildings around it and it was

shaking.

“Margot!”

She shouted just as countless lights shook violently. The homing bullets had slammed into the large wooden container.

...Damn...!!

She swallowed the “it”.

She had yet to confirm what exactly had happened. And at the moment...

“Why you...!”

She dodged a homing bullet right at the ceiling of the stealth barrier.

She flew upside down and grazed along the cylindrical wall that resembled white fog.

“Accelerate...!”

Still flying upside down, she tricked the bullets into detonating and dodged them.

But the many explosions behind her were no guarantee of her safety.

...They're what allow me to reach Margot!

With that thought, her broom danced to avoid any further attacks from behind. However...

“Eh?”

Naruze was unexpectedly aided by an enemy mistake.

All of the bullets pursuing her burst into light and disappeared.

The spells had been canceled.

A Magie Figur blossomed and shattered into light for each of the enemy bullets.

Naruze seemed pushed onward by those vanishing flowers.

...What!?

And just as she wondered what this meant...

“Over here.”

That did not come from the front. It came from ahead to the right, but down below. And since Naruze was flying upside down, that put it overhead.

“—————!”

Naruze’s reflexive combat instincts led her to take evasive action for homing bullets.

That saved her life.

To her, it was up and to the left, but she dropped upside-down toward the Musashi. At that same moment, something approached the base of her throat.

...A homing bullet!

Frighteningly, it was one given almost no speed.

This was different from before. It was a low speed shot that erased even the sound of the wind as it flew.

But she had dodged it.

Her burst of speed had removed her from the threat.

She had evaded, so now it was time to attack. She raised her right arm.

“Didn’t I tell you I was over here?”

Just as she heard that voice, Naruze saw the enemy.

...Down and to the right!

While flying upside down, that was overhead. Wild Kamelie herself flew in with her broom.

It was not from straight ahead, but for Naruze to immediately dodge it...

...Oh, no...!

She could have managed another bullet or ranged attacks from two sides, but this close-range counterattack was different.

“————”

The immediate operation of the broom revealed the inadequacy of its fine-

tuning.

The acceleration spell went off early in the feather broom's brush.

The force was enough to throw Naruze from the broom. She could have just clung tightly to it, but she had lifted her upper body to view Wild Kamelie overhead and she had been holding the pen in her right hand to counterattack.

Wind rushed between her body and her *schale besen* and her right hand flailed.

Then an impact hit her.

It was not a bullet.

It was not a cannon blast.

It was Wild Kamelie herself as she rapidly soared in.

"Okay. Lose your broom and you're out of the fight."

A horizontal lariat hit Naruze diagonally up from her right side.

Wild Kamelie saw the Weiss Hexen knocked through the air.

...*That was a solid hit.*

Her assessment was accurate.

Having lost its owner, the white broom flew aimlessly away thanks to the malfunctioned acceleration spell.

But the Technohexen and the broom would not find each other again. The Weiss Hexen had passed out and was falling. So Wild Kamelie decided she had ended the battle.

"Oh?"

The white feather broom shot past her tilted head from back to front.

It had supposedly flown off in a random direction just now. And since its rider had been knocked off, it was now empty.

So if it had returned and aimed for her from behind...

“Did you draw out a guide line at the very end?”

The Weiss Hexen had been holding a pen in her right hand when she was hit. She must have drawn out a guide line with that pen.

A line that had it turn around, return to its owner, and nearly hit Wild Kamelie on the way.

...She has decent instincts.

“But it was not enough.”

Wild Kamelie fired a bullet after the white broom.

It was an accurate shot, so it hit the feather broom, destroyed the back end, and blasted it toward the ceiling.

Then she looked to the falling Weiss Hexen.

The hit to her right side had been effective because the girl really was unconscious.

A blow to the side from below would hit the diaphragm and stop the breathing. It would normally just knock the breath out of you, but during the tension of combat, the lungs would be unable to send oxygen to the brain and you would blackout.

So Wild Kamelie prepared her broom.

While in midair, she held the broom below her right arm and aimed the nose toward the falling Weiss Hexen.

And just as she was going to fire...

“Over here.”

Wind blew in from behind her. It came from down and to the left.

...There she is!

“Margot Naito.”

Her opponent attacked from the air behind her and Wild Kamelie spoke to her without even looking back.

“I predicted this.”

And she fired. She used the broom's acceleration to fire from the thruster on the back.

It was directed toward Naito.

"Naito-dono!"

Tenzou watched the acceleration light he assumed was Naito and saw it get hit by a counterattack.

His companions on Oume were tapping the H-button.

And in the sky...

...Has she won!?

Naito and Naruze were ranked second in the delivery business and they were up against the person ranked first.

They were currently fighting a primarily defensive battle. Asama had informed him that was because they were making adjustments to their *schale besens*.

But more than that...

...How much are their attempts getting through?

Naito's attack just now had essentially been a surprise attack.

If not even that worked...

"What are they supposed to do?"

This commotion would not end until one side or the other was defeated.

So far, there had been damage to public property, but no people had been harmed. People were sending in protests about the noise, but that was because the Musashi and the Asama Shrine had been protecting the city.

This would determine the ranking in Musashi's delivery business.

That was a ritual that would determine the distribution and standing of the personnel that transported goods throughout Musashi. Many interests were at stake here. That was why a lot was allowed. However...

...If this continues for too long, the Chancellor's Officers will be forced to act!

Below, the automaton named P-01s had stepped out to view the commotion.

Is she going to make a complaint? wondered Tenzou as he looked down and she did indeed hold the Blue Thunder's portable shrine.

"Yes, is this the guards? A ninja who did not buy anything at all has jumped onto our ceiling and he keeps providing commentary and shouting things like 'What...!?' . He is being a nuisance, so please do something about it."

"...Tenzou-kun, at least buy something."

"That's right, Tenzou. Of course, we're only here to pick up an order, so we don't have to buy anything."

"Y-you're setting up your defenses in advance!" he protested. "You're oddly used to this, aren't you!?"

But no one responded from below.

Only a sign frame appeared. It displayed Kimi who spoke while smiling with the ends of her eyebrows lowered.

"Hey. ...A flower is about to bloom."

Just then, a white flower did indeed bloom in the night sky.

It was a group of homing bullets. A cannon blast had been fired as a counterattack against Naito when she flew in from below earlier. After being dodged, it had burst into countless homing bullets.

...And those are pursuing Naito-dono!?

If they were in pursuit, then the battle was not yet over. Even if Naruze had passed out...

"Margot Naito must still be capable of fighting," said someone who stepped out of the Blue Thunder.

It was a four-winged woman who wore an old-style Tres Españan uniform.

"...Who are you?"

"Delivery Union Rank 3, Marine."

She spoke quietly and held a paper bag labeled "Newly Released Product:

Silver”.

“The real question is how those two will endure Wild Kamelie’s attacks.”

Wild Kamelie realized the enemy below had dodged her attack.

...Oh?

The enemy Schwarz Hexen had used her wings.

She must have been on the lookout for an attack. So...

“Did you use your wings to fly from your broom and dodge it?”

The broom was below and the Schwarz Hexen was even higher than Wild Kamelie.

She dodged the blast fired below her, but just like before, it turned into a barrage of homing bullets.

To pursue the ascending enemy, the homing bullets rose into the sky ahead of Wild Kamelie, but it would not end with that.

The “enemy” was more than just the Schwarz Hexen flying overhead. There was also the Weiss Hexen falling below.

But neither of them had any means of dodging.

They had both let go of their *schale besen* and were unarmed in the air.

Even so, Wild Kamelie did not hold back.

“I guess I’ll go for one more.”

She fired again to create an uninterrupted wall of barrages instead of allowing a time delay between them.

One shot.

Two shots.

Three shots.

On the fourth consecutive shot, she found all other light had vanished from her surroundings.

It was a flower of homing bullets. And that light overwhelmed Musashi's night.

"Now, go."

Wild Kamelie threw herself out the back of the blossoming flower to leave the light and enter the darkness once more.

The old Technohexen sent a flower of impacts to the new Technohexen. And...

"You have a way of enduring this, don't you?"

With that question, Wild Kamelie indeed saw the enemy moving beyond the bright light.

First, it was just the Schwarz Hexen, but...

"Weiss and Schwarz. ...That distinction didn't used to exist. You need to remember that."

Naito's decision was more or less a gamble.

She did not think it had been a mistake to abandon her broom and leap into the sky to avoid Wild Kamelie's cannon blast. If she had just flown on in, that counterattack would have hit her.

...And if I had tried to fly around it, Ga-chan probably would've been shot.

But losing her broom hurt a lot.

After all, she could sense the light of the many bullets behind her.

...Wow.

How many was that? She could hardly believe it.

But there was a way to dodge them. It was a gamble, but...

"There...!"

She reached her right hand out into what appeared to be empty air. And...

“It came...!!”

Something arrived there: Naruze’s feather broom.

...I knew it would turn around and come back if Ga-chan had given it a guide line!

That was exactly what had happened.

It was actually lucky that Wild Kamelie’s attack had destroyed the rear part. That had weakened the acceleration, which slowed it enough for her to grab it.

When she pulled the white broom in, it was in gliding standby mode.

She and Naruze shared most of their settings through their hard point parts. So...

<Rider: Approved: Confirmed>

This would work.

When she pulled it close and straddled it, she felt Naruze’s residual body heat on the seat.

The cowling had taken some damage, but she was here now because she had concluded she could do this.

So she raised her voice.

“Ga-chan!”

Something had to have reached Naruze as she fell down below: the Schwarz Hexen *schale besen* she had thrown down that way when abandoning it.

Its straight-line shape had lost its cowling in some areas, but...

...It reached her!!

The black broom had arrived under falling Naruze’s arm so that it was positioned between her wings and side.

The problem was Naruze.

She was still unconscious and falling.

...Not good!

Her falling speed was increasing and her black wings were beginning to flap in the wind.

The black broom under her arm could not keep up with that fall. The tail end was floating up and it began to peel away from Naruze.

“Kh...!”

Naito ignored the wall of glowing bullets approaching behind her and pointed the feather broom down.

The air resistance when pointing it up or down was surprisingly strong. That made sense given its flat design, but...

...Make it in time!

It isn't possible, screamed a part of her mind. *The distance between you is too great.*

The wall of bullets would hit her before she arrived. She knew that, but...

“———”

Naito breathed in and chose a vertical descent.

She used the white broom's full power to fly toward Naruze.

“Ga-chan! ...Wake up!”

Naito thought.

She thought while racing through the sky faster than freefall.

She thought about how to wake Naruze up.

...This is awful.

It was Ga-chan who invited me to this battlefield.

And here I am getting the most worked up over it.

But that may have been the normal way of things. It was not the battlefield that had her so worked up.

It was her desire to continue spending time with Naruze in the best possible

way.

So she raised her voice and left the bullets to her left as they shined on both her and Naruze.

“Ga-chan!”

Wake up.

“...It’s morning!!”

Wild Kamelie raised her eyebrows at what she heard.

...That’s the oldest trick in the book.

She silently criticized the attempt, but she still did not let her guard down.

Looking back, this enemy had never done anything for no reason.

Even while making adjustments to their *schale besens*, they had chosen precise evasion methods and endured all of her attacks.

This was the same.

After evading her cannon blast, they had tried to regroup.

“In that case...”

What would they do? Wild Kamelie spoke while keeping her distance.

“We are Technohexen. We are the users of magic.”

So...

“You can do it, can’t you? You can make this the morning instead of the night.”

Wild Kamelie looked back as she spoke.

When she did, the morning arrived.

It arrived as a noise. The tone was distant but it rang with an undeniable depth and breadth.

This was not the alarms ringing within Musashi and in the surface city. Nor was it the dogs howling in response.

...This is...

A bell.

It was Musashi Ariadust Academy's bell ringing to inform them of the time. And...

"That was a long ring. Just like the morning bell...!"

Atop Musashino's bridge, an automaton slowly opened her mouth.

She just barely opened her eyes and looked aft to view Oume's sky as she made a calm announcement.

"City residents. ...Quasi-Bahamut-class Aerial City Ship Musashi is using Musashi Ariadust Academy's bell to announce the time is 8:30. Over."

"Huh? 'Musashi'-san?" A divine transmission from Sakai arrived as the bell rang. "Don't you usually say '8:30 at night'?"

"Judge. But the Technohexen seem quite lively today." "Musashi" turned around and walked toward the stairs leading down inside the bridge. "I have determined that night is morning for Technohexen. Over."

Naruze woke up.

She heard the bell.

...U-umm...

She heard the bell.

It had to be morning.

But should she be hearing that bell?

...That's right. If I'm hearing the bell, I must be late.

And yet she heard the bell. And...

"...Eh?"

She heard the bell. She also saw what seemed to be the morning sun. And she

heard Margot.

“Wake up! Ga-chan!”

She heard the bell: *kin kon kan kon*. It was the academy’s bell. But at the moment...

“————”

She heard the bell on the battlefield.

Naruze woke up. She held a black broom that that was threatening to slip up and away.

“The bell...”

She heard it, her vision was filled with light, and her precious partner was descending from the sky.

She heard the bell. So she spoke.

“Sorry, Margot. I fell asleep again.”

She heard the bell while she brought acceleration back to the broom she held.

“I’m fine now. So let’s get going...to the battlefield we sought.”

Masazumi saw the explosion in the sky as she rushed to the Blue Thunder with the others.

Flowers blossomed in the port sky while the Aoi Sister took a back step up onto the roof.

The large attack blossoms shattered from the center and exploded.

“What is that...?”

“Naito and Naruze keep forcibly dodging.” Naomasa sounded exasperated. “But I’m monitoring their brooms and both of them are pretty badly damaged, so how are they pulling that off?”

That was not something Masazumi could answer.

She was just a student. And one who hoped to become a politician. However...

...I can at least root for them, right?

“Someone.” She looked across the group that was gathered here. “I can’t really use divine transmissions, so can someone pass a message on to them? ... Tell them to do their best.”

Wild Kamelie saw a certain fact.

She saw the enemy dodging her barrage in its entirety.

But their cowlings were broken in a few places.

The Weiss Hexen’s broom had been pierced through the tail end, so it should not have had much acceleration.

The Schwarz Hexen’s broom appeared to have damage to the nose, so it should not have had much stability.

It should have been impossible for them to dodge this many homing bullets like that.

Yet the two of them were scattering countless flowers of destruction. And they were approaching Wild Kamelie.

They were using their evasive actions to gradually close the gap between them. How had they done that?

“Did they combine their brooms...!?”

Naruze smiled when she saw Masazumi’s message relayed by Asama.

...Now this is nice!

A classmate was cheering them on. And this was support from someone she had thoughtlessly asked too many questions of the other day.

She hid her grateful and amused thoughts in her heart and she shifted the position of the white broom.

It was currently positioned on the bottom side of the black broom. The white and black brooms were pressed together, bottom to bottom.

The two were one.

Her broom had its nose sticking out a bit further.

...Because I need to provide the stability.

They had redone the settings so the two brooms were used as one.

Margot handled the acceleration and power control. Naruze handled the direction control and attack prep.

This was only possible because they used shared settings. And...

“Here we go, Margot. Everyone is cheering us on, so let’s show them some speed.”

She raised the pen in her right hand and drew a guide line out in front of the nose.

“We’ll catch up to her in no time!”

A bell rang through Musashi’s night sky.

Light blossomed high in the sky as if to join that noise.

And it had spread beyond just the sky over Oume.

It flew forward from Oume to reach Murayama and Asakusa. Then it turned sharply starboard to pass in front of Musashino and to Shinagawa. From there, it completed the circuit of Musashi’s sky by flying to Tama and Takao.

Homing bullet flowers bloomed along that path, but they were soon passed by and shattered.

The blossoms sounded like gunfire and the scattering sounded like the roar of acceleration.

The bullets sometimes flew in a straight line and the pursuing acceleration had to fly high or low. But those were evasive actions and the two Technohexen would immediately return to their original course.

“Hold on...” said one of the men ringing the fire bell as he viewed the scene from Okutama. “They can’t see us...”

Marine got up on the Blue Thunder's roof to view the battle.

"..."

She realized one thing about this.

"Wild Kamelie."

She had once tried to surpass that woman as an enemy.

That attempt had been stopped by Zwei Fräulein who had also defeated Almirante, but...

"You wouldn't have accepted a challenge from me, would you have?"

Because...

"This power you're showing here...is something you've never shown anyone before."

She knew why.

They were Technohexen.

The old Technohexen could use any kind of power and the new Technohexen could only use the Weiss or Schwarz power.

Looking just at strength, the former would definitely be stronger.

In fact, the split between Weiss and Schwarz had been an excuse to allow Technohexen to continue existing. They had split their power in two so that the general public would accept them.

It was perfectly possible to say they had taken the easy road.

But, thought Marine.

...What if someone overturned that?

Edel Brocken's new prototype for the year was "for two".

No one knew what that Technohexen brand's ultimate goal was.

But even the center of the Technohexen world was seeking a change to match the current age.

Wild Kamelie was their tester, but she was an old Technohexen.

“Is that why?”

This battle was a new starting line for her.

If she won, she would abandon the old ways. She would remain as Edel Brocken’s tester and move forward with a new partner.

But if she lost, she would abandon the new ways. She would lose the tester position and withdraw from the forefront so nothing got in the way of being an old Technohexen.

That was why she was going all out. And...

“Yes...”

She was showing these new Technohexen what a Technohexen was supposed to look like.

She did so in how she fought, how she flew, and how she did everything else.

That generation had known nothing when they arrived at Musashi and they had chosen the path of a new Technohexen without any trouble. Those girls were now being shown the true form of a Technohexen.

That continued even now.

“Is she going for it?”

Wild Kamelie suddenly took a firing stance in midair.

She jumped off of her *schale besen* and fired a shot while turning around.

But by this point, Zwei Fräulein was keeping up with her. When the homing bullets circled around to hit them from behind, the two girls used a single feint to get them all to detonate each other.

If they followed the same pattern as the last few times, Zwei Fräulein would then fly forward to get even closer to Wild Kamelie.

That was exactly what happened.

But then something changed.

Before, Wild Kamelie had hopped back on her broom and flown to keep some

distance.

...But not this time!

Wild Kamelie used the recoil of firing to give her entire broom a vertical half rotation.

The nose had been pointed forward, but now it was aimed at Zwei Fräulein.

“That was well done...!”

With forceful acceleration, Wild Kamelie passed right by Zwei Fräulein’s side.

Zwei Fräulein could not make an immediate turn in time. For one thing, they were using two brooms as one. They were just barely managing to force that to work, so a 180 turn was out of the question.

But the enemy had done it.

She circled behind Zwei Fräulein and from close range...

“Herrlich.”

Just as Marine muttered that word to herself, she saw light fired from a few dozen meters directly behind Zwei Fräulein. In aerial combat, that qualified as close range.

Wild Kamelie had used a single blast instead of homing bullets.

It was a straight-line scattershot using the contents of a coin roll.

This was a tactic and bullet type she had not used until now. So...

“Is that your clincher...!?”

...This will end it!

Wild Kamelie fired.

This was her best attack.

She got the enemy accustomed to the homing movements and then used a scattershot.

Straight-line bullets were faster than homing ones. Scattershot even more so.

They could not react to or dodge this.

Those new Technohexen of Weiss and Schwarz would likely become their main fighting force eventually, but not yet.

“Musashi’s skies still belong to the old.”

So...

“The Apocalypse and mysterious phenomena are still problems, but if anything happens to the Musashi, it is we who will protect it.”

The Technohexen had nowhere else to go, so in an emergency, they could battle other nations.

It did not matter that they were not students.

Because the other nations refused to recognize that Technohexen even existed.

They were delinquents.

So they were a fighting force that could choose to leave Musashi’s control.

...Doing the dirty work to protect the new generation might be nice.

She had only started to think that during this battle.

If she won, she would continue to work as Edel Brocken’s tester.

She would invite other old Technohexen and show the other nations that Musashi still had some people who could cause them trouble.

That was why she dropped a certain word from her mouth.

“Herrlich.”

She was not speaking to the shot she had fired. She was speaking to herself for giving herself this shot at victory.

But then she realized something.

There was nothing at all in the airspace ahead of the bursting scattershot.

...They vanished?

The black and gold forms of the two new Technohexen had disappeared.

Wild Kamelie was surprised.

...How did that happen?

Her very first thought was one of doubt.

But then she accepted the truth before her eyes.

The enemy had dodged her attack. And...

...They moved so quickly my senses couldn't keep up...!

The rest was simple.

She heard a sound: a bell. The bell was approaching the end of its ringing, but it masked the sounds of an approach. An approach from...

“Above!!”

Wild Kamelie swung up her *schale besen* and fired.

There was a white explosion in Musashi's sky.

A white *schale besen* had fallen straight down toward Wild Kamelie and been hit by the coin roll bullet fired from directly below.

Wild Kamelie had fired the coin roll right into the nose of the *schale besen* accelerating straight down at her, but she did not watch its destruction through to the end.

...It was empty!

No one had been riding that white *schale besen*.

So it had been a decoy. The enemy was really...

“Behind me...!?”

She understood the tactic.

The enemy had rapidly flown over her.

It was the black broom that could accelerate so much. The white one had only been extra weight at this point, so they had abandoned it. And they had done

so as an attack straight down at her.

After circling behind her, the black broom's nose was charging toward her.

There were two people riding it: the black and gold pair. They sat alongside each other and embraced each other with the white one's hand extended forward.

The front of the black *schale besen* was damaged. The white was correcting the instability with a guide line.

But that was not enough to explain their high-speed evasion.

How had they seemingly disappeared like that?

"Is that it...!?"

Wild Kamelie saw something as she looked back.

She saw the enemy flying at her without hesitation. She saw the acceleration spells used by the black Technohexen.

Before, she had used one in front and two in the back.

That had changed.

"Herrlich!"

There were two in front and three in the back, for a total of five. That was more than Wild Kamelie's four.

That would have given them plenty of speed even with two of them onboard.

.../ see.

The Schwarz Hexen had survived earlier when the container dropped on her from the sky. Wild Kamelie had thought she had messed up the timing on dropping it or the girl had fired a shot to escape, but that was not the case.

The enemy had forced her way through with her acceleration spells.

But a total of five acceleration spells was really pushing it. Wild Kamelie was an Edel Brocken tester and even she could only control four.

"Are you using that ridiculous number of acceleration spells so you can use Edel Brocken's next prototype!?"

The enemy did not respond. They simply charged straight toward her.

She reacted by using her entire body to forcibly turn her broom around and aim the firing portion at the enemy.

She could do it. She would make it in time. She could fire a counterattack.

So she raised her voice.

“Herrlich!”

Naruze saw the shot. It was flying in a straight line and aimed at their center. However...

“Margot!”

“Ga-chan!”

They could not see each other’s face, but they could hear each other’s voice. They knew each other’s location, so they knew what the other would do.

When Naruze spread her left arm to the left, Margot did the same with her right arm and pulled her body in closer.

Naruze brought her left hand around Margot’s back and held her close. And together...

“Let’s go...!”

In that instant, Naruze gave a trajectory line to the broom.

They flew.

They instantly hopped up and flew over Wild Kamelie’s head.

But they did not land behind her.

They made a vertical rotation of 270 degrees.

They were 12 meters directly below her. With the enemy visible overhead, they had one goal: ...*A way of winning this!*

From there, they could keep Wild Kamelie in their sights whether she moved to the front, back, left, or right. So...

“Here goes!”

Finally, the two of them hopped off of the *schale besen*.

They used their wings to lean back into horizontal positions.

Naruze was on the right and Margot on the left. They held the black broom from either side.

They took the position to fire a cannon blast in midair.

Needless to say, they had not planned for this. The stance and everything else were just mimicking what they had seen their enemy do.

But Margot opened the acceleration spells on the broom’s brush. That just left the cry: “Herrlich!”

Their voices rang out in unison.

Within an explosion of acceleration spells, Naruze lost sight of something: Wild Kamelie.

The enemy was no longer in front of them.

The old Technohexen had achieved a burst of speed never before seen with her four acceleration spell method.

And she did not end up to the front, back, left, or right of them.

“Over here.”

She was behind their backs – directly below them.

Wild Kamelie felt her entire body protesting.

That movement had hurt. She normally moved around at high speed while properly riding her *schale besen*. But this time...

...You really shouldn’t do that while holding the broom under your arm.

She was lucky she had only needed to move down.

That had let her use the gravitational acceleration to assist her forced burst of speed.

As a result, the movement was rough and she had trouble stopping. But the cannon was aimed upwards. She could fire immediately after having the enemy circle around her.

Her entire body was shaking so much she was nearly knocked away, but she knew this opponent was dangerous enough to require this.

After all, these two *could think*.

Instead of responding to her actions by the book, they used adlibbed countermeasures. And not just as individuals. They thought up separate ideas and combined them.

I see, thought Wild Kamelie.

This must be the kind of new Technohexen that Edel Brocken is seeking.

Weiss and Schwarz. They followed the trend of the coming age.

...Yes.

She had to accept it. These two could *do it*.

But she had a chance to win this.

The enemy's five acceleration spell method was not synced up with their attacks.

So they could not reaccelerate immediately after using it and then firing.

That meant they could not move after firing.

Wild Kamelie was different. She only used four spells, but they were synced with her attacks and she could accelerate instantly.

So she had taken the ideal position immediately after they had fired.

She was behind them and they were still unable to move.

If she fired, she would win.

A scattershot would be best for defeating them both at once. They might be badly injured at such close range, but...

"I will not apologize."

"Yes."

She heard a voice.

“We would appreciate that.”

Just as she wondered what they were talking about, Wild Kamelie was hit by a close-range attack.

“!?”

They had not fired their cannon.

The two enemies still had their back turned as they faced upwards, but they had launched an attack.

“Of course we couldn’t mimic that midair cannon so soon after seeing it.”

So...

“We knew you would circle behind us, so we pretended to fire and launched the *schale besen* instead. ...Launched it at you.”

Wild Kamelie smiled when she was hit.

...That’s crazy...!

The white *schale besen* had been destroyed.

So she had assumed they would never abandon the black one.

They had convinced her they would go for the symbolism of defeating her with the midair cannon she had used on them.

But their final attack was different.

“The midair cannon was a feint so you could crash the *schale besen* into me...!?”

Yes, thought Wild Kamelie.

Those two don’t have to hold onto their brooms.

Because they had those black and gold wings.

They were Technohexen who could fly without brooms.

...Dammit.

I can't keep on like this.

I'm not old-fashioned. I'm just hardheaded.

And she could not fire her own cannon in time.

The five spell *schale besen* would reach her on its straight line path. Light filled the wooden handle visible through the broken front end.

And just as she saw that guide line drawn by the Weiss Hexen...

“...!”

Wild Kamelie was hit.

The direct hit sent her flying.

...So it's over.

Tenzou watched the battle's conclusion from the Blue Thunder's roof.

The two winged girls pursued the Technohexen who began falling after leaving her broom.

As a Musashi resident, she would have divine protections and charms to reduce her falling speed, so Naito and Naruze were only catching her as a sign of concern and respect for their opponent.

“...Does this mean the ranking has changed?”

“That isn't all,” said a female voice next to him.

The smiling voice came from Marine whose four wings were spread wide. She was facing the Technohexen.

“Musashi's skies have new protectors now.”

With that, she took flight.

Tenzou realized the bell had stopped ringing.

The battle was over.

In the end, it took Naito and Naruze an hour to regroup in front of the Blue

Thunder after collecting their brooms.

Asama smoothed things over with the guards and Chancellor's Officers, it was decided the damage to the city would be repaired using the delivery union's reserve funds, and "Musashi" gave the following conclusion: "I just hope none of the city's residents were harmed. ...To clarify, you are not responsible for any injuries caused because the resident unwisely went outside to watch the commotion. Over."

Meanwhile, a party to celebrate the win had to be postponed due to the Blue Thunder's damage. According to the manager: "Sorry, but you'll have to wait until tomorrow night if you want food to go with it. I'll have something good ready by then."

Thus, their gathering was just to greet each other. But Kimi laughed and made another suggestion.

"Heh heh. Tomorrow we also have the Spring School Festival's opening ceremony, so for today, how about we head to Suzu's bath and spend the night at the Asama Shrine? Also," she continued. "Naito, Naruze? You showed me something nice, so I will give you something nice. ...You could use the tuning data for the theatre ship, right?"

That concluded it. Everyone bought what food they could at the Blue Thunder and followed Kimi's suggested plan. Except, that is, for Naito, Naruze, and Naomasa who headed home instead since they had to inspect the collected brooms.

Masazumi also chose to head home and Musashi's night finally quieted down. Once morning arrived, the Spring School Festival would begin.

Chapter 7: Beginners in a Sleepy Place

第七章

『寝坊場の駆け出し者達』



急げ急げと思うのは
自分が遅れているからだろうか
配点（詩人にならんでも）

Do I keep telling myself to hurry

Because I am running late?

Point Allocation (You Don't Need to be a Poet)

Mitotsudaira was half asleep.

A lot had happened the night before.

...Um.

What had happened and how had it turned out?

She knew she was sleeping in Asama's room. She had been sleeping here more often than her own mansion lately. She had effectively been living here.

Asama and Kimi slept on either side of her and Adele and Suzu were nearby. Heidi must have left earlier because her futon was folded up.

Naito, Naruze, and Naomasa were not here.

...That leaves...

Masazumi had gone home at a convenient time the night before.

Her father was strict and she had to work as a part-time teacher at the elementary school this morning.

"That can't be easy..."

With that, Mitotsudaira opened a sign frame.

It was morning. The light entering through the paper sliding door was blocked by a partition, but the room was still bright.

...What time is it?

The sign frame told her it was 8:29 in the morning.

After reading the number, she gave a meaningless nod.

After a while, she looked at the number again.

It was 8:29.

Asama would get up for her purification at 4:30 in the morning, so about 4

hours had passed since then.

“Honestly.”

Mitotsudaira held her left hand to the bitter smile on her lips and lightly slapped the sign frame with her right hand.

“Tomo, did you oversleep? For 4 hours?”

Then she breathed in.

It was the morning air, but the warm scent of their shared sleeping space also entered her lungs. Then the wolf gave a shout.

“We’re going to be laaaaate!”

Naruze hurriedly prepared for the day.

...Crap!

After leaving their brooms with Naomasa last night, they had gone home. Then the exhaustion had hit.

But it had been a physical exhaustion, not a mental one. In fact, they had been in an incredible mood.

“Ha ha.”

She had embraced Margot, Margot had accepted it, and they had collapsed onto the floor in the back of the room.

They had not had the strength to climb into bed, but they had been in high spirits.

“Margot.”

“Nn.”

Margot had kissed her without warning. Then they had pressed their bodies together in a kneading way, like they were heated clay. They had pulled each other close, leaving no gap between them.

“We did it.”

They both said it at about the same time and they laughed.

They had used their stripped-off clothing as a bed and their wings as a blanket as they treated each other's hands, lips, and skin like their own. They had searched for and been guided to what they lacked and all of a sudden found themselves laughing.

"I can't believe it."

So...

"Let's make sure we remember this."

Naruze did not remember who had said that and who had responded.

But when they had woken up in the morning on top of their scattered clothes which smelled of sweat and perfume, they had laughed together again.

"Ga-chan, you kind of tore my tights. You need to take them off properly."

"And you left my shirt on, Margot. That's kind of kinky."

After that, their shoulders had shaken with more meaningless laughter. They lowered their heads so their foreheads touched.

"...Let's send the tester request later."

"Sure. But, Ga-chan."

"What?"

Naito spread her mouth horizontally and pointed toward the room's entrance.

"We left the door open."

"...We were behind the desks, so we're safe."

They had been less safe in something other than their location.

They had heard a bell ringing.

"...Eh?"

Opening a Magie Figur had shown it was already 8:30.

12 hours had passed since the night before.

"Oh, no..."

“U-umm, let’s at least wipe down our bodies. ...Okay, Ga-chan, I’ll wipe you down, so I’d love it if you stood up and let me see everything.”

“You sure are enjoying yourself this morning, Margot!”

Naruze returned the favor, so a fair amount of time passed.

They brushed their hair with a hair-washing charm comb that used an Asama Shrine purification and then they started to leave.

“Ah.”

The white feather broom had taken a lot of damage, so they had left it with Naomasa. So...

“Let’s take my broom!” said Naito. “We can ride it together!”

That sounded great.

Naito held out the broom and Naruze grabbed both it and her hand.

“Let’s go.”

They hurried out into the hall.

Asama ran up the steps to the surface area.

Adele was in the lead, followed by...

“Mitotsudaira...-san, a-are you...okay?”

“I am just fine. You are far lighter than the musical instruments.”

Mitotsudaira was carrying Suzu and Kimi was running behind them.

In the distance, they could hear the bell ringing and fireworks bursting.

...I-I can’t believe this...!

Asama had rushed through the purification and only changed clothes. She had not eaten anything or made any other preparations. Fortunately, this was the opening ceremony for the Spring School Festival, so they did not have to be ready for class. However...

“I can’t believe we’re late on the very first day...”

“That’s right,” said Kimi as she came up alongside her. “I woke up in the morning and saw it was 4. And when I checked the clock, the alarm was set for 4:30, right? Well, I didn’t want to be woken up just 30 minutes after going back to sleep, so I turned off the alarm. ...I wonder why we’re running late?”

“Think about what you just said and you might just figure it out! Okay!? Can you do that!?”

At any rate, the culprit had confessed, so the mystery was solved.

The end of the stairs came into view. Suzu would be going a different way so she could head home first and Adele ran off along the surface area before turning around. She looked back at them from the path into the nature district.

“Go on ahead! I’ll find us a story we can tell Sensei as an excuse!”

“Thanks!”

Just as Asama said that, a pack of barking dogs ran up from port.

They easily swallowed up Adele.

“Hyaaaaah!!”

The dogs wanted their morning walk.

That meant Adele was useless.

So Asama looked away as Adele was carried off by the wave of dogs. They were on the border between the Asama Shrine and the surrounding nature district. She looked to the path leading into the latter.

...Would it be faster to take Remorse Way?

That road was near the stern on the starboard side of the Asama Shrine. It had little foot and carriage traffic, so it was useful when in a hurry. But...

“Well, we should be fine.”

They were definitely running late. So it would be better to head straight to school instead of forcing themselves to take a certain path.

So...

“Let’s go.”

Asama ran toward the academy visible in the distance. And she was confident the other two would follow behind her.

Huh? thought Naito as she flew through the sky.

The bell was ringing and some people were running along Okutama's surface to reach the academy.

"Ga-chan, Asama-chi's group is down there."

"Huh? Why are they late?"

Naito wanted to say it made no sense since waking up early was one of Asama's special skills, but...

...They were there with us last night.

So she lowered the broom's altitude a bit and flew into the sky above that group.

She could see the three headed to the academy and Suzu heading to Musashino.

Suzu was the first to notice. She looked up at the broom and smiled.

...It's a lot like Bell-rin to head home and prepare for the day first...

But the other three had not noticed, so Naito thought up a way of clueing them in.

"Kiiiin, koooon, kaaaan, koooon."

She mimicked the bell they could all hear.

Asama noticed.

"Oh, are you two running late too?"

"If we dive into the window at super speed, you're the only ones who will be late."

"Ah, looks like you're wrong about that, Ga-chan."

Someone was running up Remorse Way to starboard. It was likely Masazumi. That place was dimly lit even during the day and it was usually deserted, but the

girl was not at all bothered by it. That had to be a sign she was still fairly unfamiliar with Musashi.

...I wonder what she'll think when she finds out.

And Masazumi was not the only one in a hurry.

There was also a group to port running toward the academy.

Tenzou and Toori were there. So were Noriki, Persona-kun, and that group.

“Tenzou, what are you doing?”

“W-well, after the excitement last night, Toori-dono said something about helping Konishi-dono with a job and we ended up transporting cargo from transport ships and warehouses!”

“Oh, to earn some money for the festival?”

“Yes, I suppose that was the result. So why are you-...”

Before Tenzou could finish his question, the idiot's voice came over the Magie Figur.

“I hear you're ranked first now!”

Oh, word gets around fast, she thought.

“That's incredible!”

That line sent a tremor through her body.

The word “incredible” made Naito hesitate.

...H-hm?

Was it incredible? Was it really? They had both done quite well, but...

...W-was it...incredible? Was it, was it? I don't know.

Musashi had Asama, Mitotsudaira, Kimi, the Chancellor's Officers, and the Student Council.

Naito and Naruze were proud of what they had done, but would the others really see it as...

“...Incredible?”

The idiot definitely responded to that question.

“Judge,” he began. “It’s incredible. Yeah.”

It was weird how a voice could bring such joy. But Naruze embraced her from behind.

The rising and falling of Naruze’s chest told Naito she was laughing. And...

“He says it’s incredible.”

“Yeah.”

“And if that idiot says it, I think we can believe it. I mean...idiots can’t lie.”

“Yeah,” repeated Naito as the bell continued to ring. Then she took in a breath.

...*Ah.*

She finally managed to relax.

The tension that had filled her for the past few weeks had just left her.

She was aware of her position at a crossroads between the past and the future.

...*I can hear the bell.*

That was the tone of their new awakening.

So a thought occurred to her: *Let’s make another new song for the Gagaku Festival.*

“Ga-chan. ...Think we could turn this into a song?”

“Kin kon kan kon?”

Wow, that’s cute. We’ve gotta make this into a song.

Naito nodded and wrote out the music in her mind based on the notes she heard. And...

“Let’s do this.”

Naito sang the lyrics as they occurred to her. But she could not come up with anything right away.

“Kiiin kooon kaaan kooon. Kiiin kooon kaaan kooon.”

Naruze laughed behind her before taking over for her.

“Kin kon kan kon. Kin kon kan kon.”

Ohhh, that really is cute, thought Naito. But she had to take the first real line, so she thought back to that morning.

“I can hear.”

“The alarm ringing.”

That was a quick response, Ga-chan. She couldn’t come up with something else this soon, so...

“Kiiin kooon kaaan kooon.”

“...It’s coming from school.”

Next it was Naruze’s turn to start.

“Is today Sunday?”

“Are you still dreaming?”

“Kin kon kan kon.”

...Oh, is she making it a pattern to do the kin kon there?

Happy that she had noticed that, Naito continued.

“It’s still Wednesday.”

It was her turn next, but Naruze quickly continued for her and their lyrics combined to form a single line.

“What about breakfast?” “We’re going to be late.”

“Kin kon kan kon.” “We need to get going.”

“Kin kon kan kon.”

That felt like it was becoming a standard response like judge or testament. That may have been why Naruze continued with it.

“Kin kon kan kon?”

“Kin kon kan kooon.”

“That means class is starting.”

She said that with a laugh and looked down at the others below. So she used that.

“Look down there.” “Everyone’s in a hurry.”

Naito sang it loud enough for the people down below to hear.

“Kin kon kan kooooon.”

Mitotsudaira looked up at them and yelled something, but Naito did not care. Naruze ignored it too.

“What a nice wind.”

So they would ride that wind. And from there, they would do the usual: “To the classroom window.” “Dive in and to our seats~”

“Kin kon kan kon.” “It’s the others who will be late.”

“It might mean skipping breakfast.” “But if we make it in time, we win.”

“Kiiin kon kan kon.”

“The losers will be executed.”

Naito had time to think, *That’s probably true*. They had already left the nature district and entered the academy grounds. The stairs up ahead rose more than 30m, so they had to aim the broom upwards.

“Kiiin kooon kan kon.” “Kin kon kaaan kon.” “Kin kon kaaan kon.”

“Class is starting.”

Of course, today was the School Festival. But not so in the song. It was Naruze’s turn to start and Naito assumed it would be something about class, but...

“I’m hungry.”

...Ga-chan, you’re changing direction way too much!

To get back on track, Naito hurriedly gave her own lyrics.

“We still have a lot of class left.”

See, we’re singing about that! About that! she thought, but the next line was already set.

“Kin kon kan kooon.”

Hearing that careless line, Naito thought for a moment. And...

“I have some candy?”

She pulled a wrapper from her skirt pocket and passed it back. Naruze snatched it from her hand.

She must have been happy, so Naito smiled too.

“I lick the candy.” “Adele looks back.”

We saw the dogs carrying her away somewhere, didn’t we?

“Kin kon kan kon.” “The money-lovers are smiling.”

Probably so. Heidi and Shirojiro were always in the classroom early, so she pictured the scene in the classroom.

“The quiet one faces forward.”

...Huh? Is that supposed to be Nori-rin, Masa-yan, or Pe-yan?

But she did not have time to ask.

“Tenzou is serious.”

“Kin kon kan kon.” “Uqui is napping.”

“Kiiin kon kan kon.” “Kin kon kan kooon.” “Kin kon kan kon.”

“Class continues.”

“Nenji answers.” “Itoken helps out.”

“Kin kon kan kon.” “Seijun sums it up.”

“Pe-yan is silent.”

“The pedo is excited.”

Should we really be saying that? Well, it's just Ohiroshiki. And...

"Kin kon kan kon." "Suzu sits up straight."

"It's almost lunchtime."

Naruze seemed fixated on food, but everyone was the same way around lunchtime.

"Everyone is restless."

"Kiiin kooon kan kon." "Sensei sighs."

"Kiiin kon kan kon." "Kin kon kan kooon." "Kin kon kan kon."

"Lunchtime is here."

"Naomasa closes her book."

Oh, there's Masa-yan. And Pe-yan was mentioned, so the quiet one must be Nori-rin.

...But I bet Masa-yan won't like having her name mentioned.

So to make sure it would be fine without her, Naito wanted to mention "everyone" as much as possible.

"Hassan dances."

"Kin kon kan kon." "Bara-yan submits a manuscript."

The rest was trickier. After all, it was Kimi's group. It was hard to make that sound realistic. So...

"Too-chan has no lunch."

She tried to make the scene as easy to picture as possible. And Naruze continued...

"He's empty handed."

...Y-you didn't advance the story, Ga-chan!

But Naito had their special attack:

"Kin kon kan kooon."

She could pass it right back with the bell sound. Naruze briefly groaned, but...

“...Kimi calls everyone over.”

She managed to find a good line.

The sister often did call everyone over for her brother’s lunch. So Naruze breathed a sigh of relief at having gotten past that hard part and continued forward.

“Asama has a big bento.” “Mito-tsan has yakiniku.”

“Kin kon kan kooon.” “It’s a party by the window.”

“Kiiin kon kan kon.” “Kin kon kan kooon.” “Kin kon kan kon.”

“Class is ending.”

They decided to move the story along.

“Afterschool means work.”

It was time for work. But Naito felt like they did not need that here. They had been singing a lot of songs that focused on their Technohexen side and their work.

So she wanted to widen their viewpoint and sing about something bigger.

“Work around the school.”

...Ah.

Naruze’s line showed she was thinking the same thing.

Work around the school meant it was not just their work in the sky. It was work they all shared.

“...Kin kon kan kon.”

“Everyone has their own job.”

Naruze’s line went even further ahead than Naito’s:

“The idiot is causing trouble.”

There was a smile in her voice, but was that because she was imagining the scene or because she was a bit embarrassed about widening the view beyond the two of them?

When she heard that smile, Naito's thoughts moved to a place where they would all gather.

"Holding a meeting at the bakery."

"Kin kon kan kon." "Taking a break at the shrine."

The lyrics were gradually approaching more recent times.

It was all connected to the past and that was why they had the present, but...

...As long as we don't forget that, we can focus on the present, can't we?

So Naito sang about recent things. And not just for themselves.

She sang about the others. It felt a little embarrassing to call them friends. They were something closer.

...Would classmates work?

"Singing karaoke at the bath."

That had been an interesting sight, but as their friends had sung...

"They have their feelings."

"Kin kon kan kon." "But they pretend not to notice."

Really, though. How is all of that going to work out? she wondered half in exasperation and half in enjoyment.

"Kin kon kan koon." "Kin koon kan kon." Kin kon kan kon."

"The night wears on."

They had arrived at the top of the stairs. They took a course past the front building and toward their classroom in the rear building.

"We will eventually." "Go somewhere new."

"Kin kon kan kon." "We will all go there together."

Naito nodded at Naruze's line.

"Both the new people." "And the ones you're never rid of."

"Kin kon kan kon." "Are connected by the bell."

"Listen, I hear it again." "Every day and always."

“Kin kon kan kon.” “The never-ending bell.”

They sang to keep the never-ending bell going.

“Kin kon kan kon.” “Kin kon kan kon.” “Kin kon kan kon.” “Kin kon kan kon.”

They kept the bell going because they did not know if they could stop yet.

This was their first song that widened their viewpoint.

But Naruze took her hand from behind and sang a new line.

“Let’s fall asleep while holding hands.”

Yes.

There was no end. It would not end as long as they kept it going. So...

“Even you are not by my side.”

“Kin kon kan kon.”

“The bell connects us.”

The classroom was in view. Naito and Naruze sang as they dived through the window.

“Kiiin kon kaaan kon.” “Kiiin kon kan kooon.” “Kin kon kan kon.”

Naruze’s voice joined with Naito’s and they ended it with the one line sang together.

“Kiiin kooon kaaan kooon.”

Asama looked up as the two Technohexen gently flew toward the academy.

Had they ever flown like that before?

It was unusual for them to share a broom, but...

...They always seemed to be in a hurry.

The gold and black wings rode the wind but did not let it carry them away. Kimi watched that and spoke with a smile.

“They’re in a great mood, so they’re going to be a formidable opponent.”

“A formidable opponent in what?”

When Asama asked that, Kimi stepped up alongside her and placed her hands on the bottom of Asama’s jiggling breasts.

“Listen.”

“I would rather you didn’t do that, but fine. I’ll listen. ...Actually, no. Stop slapping them from below when they fall. It kind of hurts.”

“Eh?” said Mitotsudaira. She looked dazed. “But I’ve heard massaging only makes them hurt when they’re tense on the inside. It’s supposed to be a sign that they’re about to grow...”

“D-don’t worry, Mito! Yours would hurt too if you massaged them! Okay!? Should I massage them for you!?”

“Heh heh heh. You’re so confused you have no idea what you’re saying, do you? But I’m all for any planned massages,” said Kimi. “Anyway, Asama, you didn’t actually read the Gagaku Festival’s rules, did you?”

“What rules?”

“Judge,” said Mitotsudaira instead of Kimi. She turned toward Asama as she continued. “The audience casts votes during the Gagaku Festival performances. And...”

“And?”

“Whoever gets the most has their songs go on sale...and they get a special encore.”

Asama was painfully aware of her hesitation as she asked Kimi a question.

“So when you told me to make two songs...”

“Yes, that’s right. We need one for the encore, don’t we?”

“No one told me about thaaaaat!” shouted Asama.

Naruze dived into the classroom with Margot and took a breath.

Today was the start of the Spring School Festival. The boys were mainly in

charge of Class Plum's part.

"Neshinbara, you said we were doing a cosplay café run by the idiot, but is that ready?"

"Bertoni-kun says he's loaded a transport ship with all the equipment, so he'll fly it up alongside the classroom later."

Neshinbara also had several sheets of autograph paper stacked on his desk and he started checking through their frames.

"Let's see...these are the Far Eastern ones..."

"What are you doing?"

When Margot asked, he held out two pieces of autograph paper.

"Congratulations on the #1 rank. Could you sign these for me to celebrate?"

"Fine, but...don't tell me you're planning to use the festival to beg famous people for their autographs."

"The festival gives name inheritors a lot of chances to make use of their names. And I can get closer to the Student Council and Chancellor's Officers. As a history buff, I have to take advantage of this."

"I see," she said before looking outside. She saw Oriotorai walking along the first floor of the walkway leading to their rear school building. Once she arrived at the classroom, time was up.

...Oh?

She saw Asama's group running along the second floor of the same walkway.

Oriotorai had already entered the building, so it was going to be a close one.

...It doesn't look like they can make it.

While Naruze wondered what would happen, Margot took the autograph papers and spoke to Neshinbara.

"Then you missed out, Bara-yan. We met Suzuki Magoichi the other day."

"Yeah, she's apparently a friend of the Student Council President. She's a rare one, so I'd love to get her autograph. And there's some symbolism here that

would make it a valuable autograph right now.”

“What kind of symbolism?” asked Margot.

“The Gagaku Festival theatre ship is being cleaned and remodeled,” explained Neshinbara. “And they’re apparently going to call it the Fushimi Castle. That’s the name of Torii Mototada’s castle and it was owned by the Torii clan, so that should work out. But,” he added. “The Testament says Torii Mototada died during a siege of Fushimi Castle. ...And the primary attacker was Suzuki Magoichi. He was the one to slay Torii Mototada.”

“You mean...?”

“Well, I doubt they’ll recreate that here. It’s a festival, so they would need a good reason for an interpretation to do the slaying there.”

“Yeah,” agreed Margot while Naruze nodded along with her. Just then, they heard a lot of noise in the hallway.

“Trying to race your teacher? Think again! ...I’m already counting you as late! And you!”

Naruze heard a window shattering and thought, *Oh, that idiot was kicked away again, wasn’t he?*

But the others used that opening to slide open the door and rush in with Kimi in the lead. For some reason, Adele ran in with several dogs in tow.

“Safe!!”

“No, bringing dogs with you is not safe.”

The Cerberus on Mitotsudaira’s head barked as if she belonged there.

“We never change do we?” muttered Naruze when she saw the scene.

Afterword

That was Kimitoasamade 4-A.

This volume continues from 3-A and B by focusing on Naito and Naruze's ranking battles, so you saw a lot of the events and people that were mentioned in the original novels and the anime.

While everyone is cheering on or envying the people participating in the Gagaku Festival, those participants are making various bargains. I feel like that's something that everyone does at some point, or at least something they're a part of. It doesn't have to be a festival, so it can be a test or something as well.

Festivals in this era were not so much about enjoying the new season like they are these days. They were more of a true celebration that they had survived that long and a prayer that the next season would be a good one. They did not rely on science, law, and information as much as we do now, so health, agriculture, law enforcement, and so on were reliant on the traditions inherited from nature and the past. That meant a lot of things were only possible when everyone in the region worked together. That was why festivals were used to confirm that everyone could come together as one. Worshiping the same god, sitting around the same fire, and consuming the same celebratory food and drink was not just a ceremony. It was a way of proving their mutual togetherness.

But then outsiders could not join in, so Shinto shrines would accept you if you participated in the festivals, Christianity had everyone attend mass together, and other systems for acceptance were established. It seems really well-made to me.

Musashi has the Asama Shrine to manage that kind of thing, but I think everyone would still grow closer through the festivals and other events throughout the year.

Anyway, it's short, but here's the chat.

"The novel is about a Gagaku Festival, but do you have any stories about concerts or things like that?"

"At a school festival concert, someone sang a song about a love hotel near the school, so the vice principal had to run up on stage."

"Sounds like the vice principal took his job seriously."

"For some reason, he was carrying a flowerpot, but no one knew what that was about. Maybe part of the decorations for outside."

Maybe he was planning to hit the singer with it?

Anyway, my work background music this time was Inshou wa Shiro to Kuro. That turned out to be more of a hero song than I expected, but it captures the feeling of aerial battles pretty well.

Now, Part B will be the Gagaku Festival, but let's ask ourselves, "Who was preparing the most?" 4-B will come with BD Volume 7, so wait just a while longer.

April 2012. A cold and rainy morning.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ Or it is in Japanese.
2. ↑ That kanji is the character for "woman" with the character for "man" on either side.